



The
PERSONAL CONDUCT
of
BELINDA

ELEANOR
HOYT
BRAINERD

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**The Personal
Conduct of Belinda**

BOOKS BY
ELEANOR HOYT BRAINERD



*Bettina, Concerning Belinda, The Misde-
meanors of Nancy, Nancy's
Country Christmas*





“Not bad — not at all bad,” she said genially

The Personal Conduct of Belinda

By
Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd



Illustrated by George Brehm

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**The Personal
Conduct of Belinda**

The Personal Conduct of Belinda

CHAPTER ONE

BELINDA PLEDGES HERSELF TO AN ADVENTURE

“DO TAKE the thing seriously, Belinda.”

The youngest teacher, perched on the window-sill in a fashion which the head of the school would have characterized as “unseemly,” eyed her companion with a look in which affection and exasperation struggled together.

“Take it seriously! Why, Margaret Barnes, I’m taking it tragically! It’s the most supremely horrid thing that ever happened. I can’t tell you how I feel about it. Words fail me. No; you needn’t smile. Adequate words *do* fail me. Of course, I still have a poor, weak, dribbling little vocabulary to draw upon; but, as for fine, rotund words that would do credit to a teacher of English — they’ve all been shocked out of me.”

“You could manage the trip perfectly without me,” said Miss Barnes.

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This was the third time she had made that assertion; and, for the third time, the girl on the window-sill broke into violent and fluent protest.

“Not for five minutes! Not for the hundredth part of a second! You know perfectly well that I couldn’t. I don’t know a sixpence from a gulden. I don’t recognize my own steamer trunk when I meet it face to face. I’m mere putty in the hands of a cabman. I wouldn’t dare give a head waiter less than a dollar. As for railroad tickets — heaven knows where I’d buy them for, if I had to do it in any language except English. We’d probably bring up in the Forbidden City. Isn’t that an alluring name, Margaret?”

Miss Barnes laughed — the rare laugh which softened the grave face to a certain surprising girlishness and with which no one in the school save the inconsequent young person in the window was familiar — but, having laughed, she returned to the charge.

“It would be such a shame to give up the scheme. I didn’t know anything about foreign travel when we took our first party abroad, but you know I got along all right.”

“Yes, of course; but you’re a teacher of mathematics. I’m only a teacher of literature and history. You can add and subtract and multiply. I suppose at a pinch you could even do fractions; but being able to repeat the names of the English kings backward wouldn’t be a blessed bit of help to me if I should get into a row with a

cabman over his fare. No, my dear. The thing simply can't be done. I'm a broken reed. The whole party would know within twenty-four hours that I was a whited sepulchre. What's the use of being a teacher of English if you can't mix your metaphors to taste? European tour! Why, I couldn't manage a straw ride in Beecher's Corners!"

"Nonsense! Any intelligent person can handle a ——"

"But I'm not an intelligent person," Belinda interrupted earnestly. "I can bring any number of reliable witnesses who will swear to that. I'm well-meaning. I'm even ornamental in a humble, Rogers group sort of way, but in the practical issues of life I'm a blithering idiot."

Miss Barnes was unmoved.

"You can manage my end of the proposition much more easily than I could manage yours," she urged in persuasive tones.

"Any woman who can distribute fees and understand a railway guide ——"

"Hear her speak of a foreign railway guide as if any woman ever *could* understand it!" Belinda murmured confidentially to a Botticelli Madonna who smiled with soft vagueness from a shadowy corner of the room.

"Now you and Botticelli understood that women were never intended to figure out what train leaving London in the morning would give one time to see Winchester

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and Salisbury Plain and dine at Southampton and catch the night boat for Havre. You'd never have looked as serene as you do if you'd been brought up on time-tables, Madonna Mia."

"As I was saying," continued Miss Barnes patiently (she was used to Belinda's digressions), "any one who has the money to buy information and comfort can manage the business end of a European tour; but when it comes to keeping the members of the party from grumbling and growling and quarrelling and hating each other — that calls for genius."

"And that's me?" inquired the teacher of English, with a fine disregard for the rules of grammar.

"That's emphatically you. You can make any man, woman or child adore you and believe black is white if you say it is."

"Oh, as for the men ——" assented Belinda airily.

"Well, here you have a party of eight — all pleasant and willing to pay well. You've been over most of the ground before and I'll figure out the whole itinerary for you and write it down. You can make money out of the trip and I do so hate to think that the whole plan is upset and every one's pleasure spoiled on my account. If it were anything else, I wouldn't fail you; but the doctors were so positive, and one has only one mother, and ——"

The low, clear voice broke suddenly, and the younger teacher slipped down from her seat, crossed the room

swiftly and laid a gentle hand upon the shoulder of the woman in the big wicker chair.

"Don't, Margaret. Don't look like that. You'll pull her through. You're bound to, if you'll only believe you can. The doctors said that the change to the mountains would give her a splendid chance. And don't you worry for a moment about those eight yearning pilgrims. I'll take them to Europe. I'll cram them full of misinformation and table d'hôte dinners. I won't spare them an historic cobblestone or a prehistoric chicken. I'll drag them through every gallery and cathedral in Great Britain and on the continent and when they're utterly exhausted, I'll abandon them on the Russian steppes and elope with a Cossack. I believe I'd rather like a Cossack, Margaret."

The tender sympathy had given way to raillery, but the older woman understood. It was because each in her own way shut the door upon her emotions, that the two were friends. Miss Barnes brushed with her cool, slim fingers the little hand that still rested on her shoulder. From her, the caress was eloquent, but all she said was:

"You will go?"

"I will go. Didn't I map out my programme for you? Those misguided creatures shall tour so long as the money holds out. The trip will probably be brief. Then enter Cossack. Exit defaulting conductor at a hand

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gallop. Our consul can send the party home. What do we raise consuls for?"

"You won't change your mind?"

"Margaret Barnes, I have put my hand to the plow. I'll probably walk backward, but I promise to keep my grip on the plow handles. The slaughter of the innocents be on your head! You see my references are all scriptural, so perhaps I'm a proper person for a personal conductor after all. Where's the atlas?"

They plunged deep into the mysteries of map and Baedeker and were still wrestling with routes and rates when the retiring bell rang. Belinda gathered up the books and the sheets of paper on which she had been taking notes.

"It's a subtle combination of suicide and murder," she said gayly, "but I'm going through with it. Good night, Margaret."

She went out into the hall and down the stairs to her own second-floor hall bedroom, meeting, on the way, scurrying crowds of girls who tossed her blithe good nights in passing. The teacher of English in Miss Ryder's Select School for Young Ladies was popular with the pupils, popular to a degree that was, at times, fatiguing. One and all, from sentimental Amelia Bowers to dignified Katharine Holland, from fat Evangeline Marie Jenkins, the brewer's daughter, to slender Adelaide de Peyster of blood incorrigibly blue, they adored her.

"Miss Carewe has a wonderful way with girls," Miss Priscilla Ryder was wont to remark, with a smile of satisfaction. That way of Belinda's had brought many shekels into the Ryder treasury. Pupils came, lured by a rose-hued prospectus. They stayed for the sake of Belinda, and even the thorniest and most impossible of them was as wax in the Youngest Teacher's hands.

Incidentally, it may be noted that Belinda's way did not confine its sphere of action to the girls. It was a most irresistible little way, a frank, merry, true-hearted, clear-headed, impetuous, beguiling little way. The stately Miss Ryder herself had not been proof against it; and though she never suspected her dependence, had learned to turn to the Youngest Teacher almost as inevitably as did the girls, in all times of storm and stress.

Even the cold and unimpressionable Miss Barnes, for whom the whole school had the most profound respect — and no love — succumbed to Belinda's way.

The friendship between the two teachers was an odd one, but the association was profitable to both. Belinda humanized Miss Barnes. Miss Barnes supplied a balance wheel for Belinda. And when the two conceived the idea of chaperoning parties to Europe, the advantages of the combination were emphasized. Belinda had no difficulty in finding girls to chaperon. Her only trouble lay in fending off undesirables. Moreover, the firmly implanted school tradition that whatever the Youngest

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Teacher did was right, made her admirers the most amenable of charges. Miss Barnes attended to the business end of the tours and all went well.

The first two parties were made up entirely of Ryder girls. The third season saw the introduction of a new element. A spinster from a small Tennessee town, an elderly couple from Dakota, and a superannuated clergyman from Ohio applied for admission to the party, of which they had heard through girl relatives in the school.

After that, there were as many grown-ups as girls in the Barnes-Carewe parties, but they were child-like grown-ups, quite as ingenuous and docile as the girls. Otherwise they would have been travelling alone or would have preferred the bustling activity of a Cook's party to chaperonage by two young women.

In time came the fifth season of the combination and, early in May, Miss Barnes was forced to abandon her plans and drop the entire burden upon Belinda's shoulders.

"I'll probably make an awful mess of it," said that young woman to herself, as she made ready for bed, after having committed herself to the adventure, "but there will be a ram in the thicket somewhere. My thickets are always chuckful of rams."

CHAPTER TWO

SPRING WITCHERY

PREPARATIONS for graduation day and its attendant festivities, together with the usual frenzied attempts to make up a semester's work in the last few weeks before final examinations, made the Maytime a season of strenuousness at the Ryder School; and Belinda was too deeply absorbed in present responsibilities to worry much over trials to come. Baedeker was elbowed aside while she gave her attention to such vital problems as the number of tucks on the skirt of one sweet girl graduate and the size of the bouquet to be carried by another, the printing of programmes for the Senior dance, the refreshments for the Junior tea, the floral decorations for Commencement Day, the preparation of examination papers, the making out of reports. From morning to night she spun round like a whirling Dervish, paying the penalty of her versatility and her popularity while Miss Barnes, less in demand, wrestled conscientiously with plans for the European tour. During the second week of May, an elderly couple from Ohio dropped out of the party on account of financial reverses, but, close upon the heels

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of this happening came a letter from a Mrs. Nicholson, of Winsted, Connecticut, asking whether it would be possible for her to join the party at so late a date and making inquiries concerning terms, itinerary and date of sailing.

"You will have to run up and see her, Belinda," said Miss Barnes. "She's a godsend."

"Perhaps," admitted Belinda dubiously. "She may be dreadful but I like her letter. It smells of lavender."

"It smells of money." Miss Barnes was not sentimental.

"But I can't possibly take the time to go to Winsted."

"You must."

And, in the end, Belinda went. When the teacher of mathematics said "must" argument and protest were vain.

The out-of-door world was enchanting on that third Saturday in May. Even suburbs seemed beautiful and when the train left closely crowded settlements behind and wound its serpentine way out into the real country, Belinda sighed a little sigh of content and thanked the gods that for one day she need not be adored. There were times when the rôle of universal favourite grew wearisome and this young woman of the piquant face, the infectious gaiety, the irresistible manner, wished devoutly that she might win her triumphs through mind or muscle rather than through personality.

"There's nothing in it," she confided dolefully to Margaret Barnes, in one of these moods. "I want to be a plain woman with straight hair and prominent shoul-

der blades and a big brain, or I'd like to be a first-class cook or charwoman. I'm sick of being tactful and having curly hair and dimples. Of course, I make my living that way, but it's humiliating to think that if my dimples should fill out or my hair fall out, my occupation would be gone. I'd rather have a great soul than a good complexion — no, I don't know that I would, after all. A muddy complexion is awful, and it's all on the surface. One can have reserves about one's soul."

Miss Barnes caught the note of earnestness in the petulant, half-laughing complaint.

"Don't worry about your soul, dear," she said. "There's no muddiness there. The sunshine lights it clear to the very bottom."

"Shallow little thing," scoffed Belinda, but she felt comforted.

She was thinking of this conversation as she walked along the village streets of Winsted and out along the country road in search of Mrs. Nicholson's home. After all, life was good even when one was a very small person, mentally, morally and physically. One didn't have to be a great poet in order to have spring tug at one's heart and a genius for anything save poetry would probably get between one and the springtime. It would be a pity to be ugly, too, when the world was so beautiful. One would feel such an alien even if one did have a beautiful soul. It would be as though the apple trees just went to

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work and had apples without bothering to have blossoms. Beauty was good, good, good, and youth was good, and a light heart was good, and genius might go hang for aught that Miss Belinda Carewe would care.

Having come to this reprehensible conclusion, the frivolous young woman deliberately abandoned her quest and turned aside into an orchard whose gate stood invitingly open. Mrs. Nicholson could wait. Belinda had business with the spring. A well-worn narrow path ran away beneath the bloom-laden trees, and the girl followed it until the road was out of sight. Then she sat down under a gnarled old apple tree with her back to the path and gave herself up to sensuous enjoyment. First she shut her eyes so that nothing might distract her attention from the fragrance that filled the air; that delicious fragrance, penetrating, sweet, insistent, yet never cloying, a thing apart from the heavy midsummer scents of honeysuckle or jasmine or even rose, a fragrance with the heart of the spring in it, hinting at delight, promising joy. Belinda surrendered to the sweetness of it, relaxing tired nerves, drinking in long breaths of perfume. A droning hum of bees mingled sound with scent and she snuggled down more comfortably against the friendly tree, half-drowsy with well-being, until a thought of the beauty overhead wooed her to open her eyes and look up into the drift of pink and white blossom against a sky of silvery springtime blue.

The drowsiness fell away. She was awake in every nerve, in every sense. An oriole flashed from tree to tree. Somewhere among the blossoms a bird was letting his gladness overrun in a deluge of song. Oh, the world was beautiful and life was a joy! Her mind swung back to that old question of hair and dimples, and in the midst of her spring rapture she was seized by a frivolous desire to know whether her hair still waved, and her dimples still lurked in waiting for her smiles. A little, light, foolish woman creature she was, and she admitted it, but she knew she was pretty, and she was glad of it — extraordinarily glad of it in this magic world where to be ugly would have been to be out of tune.

She opened her little bag, took out a small mirror and proceeded shamelessly and appreciatively to study her own face.

Yes, her hair still waved. It was nice hair, red brown with gold lights in it. Personally, Belinda preferred blondes, but things might have been worse. Her forehead wasn't intellectual. She admitted that ruefully. It was too low for soaring intellect, but it was broad and smooth, and her brows were really very nice. With that hair one might have had pink eyebrows, and it would be horrid to have to colour them. No fault to be found with the brown eyes, and the nose was unobjectionable save for the faint, hardly visible glints of a few freckles which the spring wind had kissed into being. A complexion beyond

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reproach, a mouth slightly larger than the canons of beauty require but an adorable mouth made for smiles and kisses, and a chin that was, if such a thing were possible, more kissable than the mouth above it.

Belinda did not estimate all these features at their real value. She was not vain, but she was appreciative; and, on the whole, the state of things revealed by the mirror satisfied her.

“Not bad,” she said genially to the face that looked up at her. “Not at all bad, my dear. You really do credit to the stage setting.”

And, as she spoke, a sound behind her made her turn swiftly to find a young man looking down at her with frank amusement in his face, and admiration as frank.

He did not pause. Before she recovered her breath he had passed and was swinging away up the path; but he had seen her studying the mirror. He had heard her. He must have heard.

Belinda sat staring after him, her face flushed so rosily that, beside it, the apple blossoms were pallid.

“Served you right for being a conceited little toad, Belinda Carewe!” she said at last, with vicious fervour. The spring spell was broken. The girl rose, pinned on her hat and followed the path back to the road. The blush lingered on her cheeks; but, a little later, as she sounded the knocker on the door of Mrs. Nicholson’s picturesque old house, she murmured defiantly:

"Well, I don't care. It *wasn't* bad — as faces go," and a smile flickered in the brown eyes, though it did not reach her lips.

Mrs. Nicholson's house was early Colonial; her furniture was Sheraton and Heppelwhite; her silver and china were old English; and, in a gentle, unassertive way, the mistress of the house harmonized with her belongings. Belinda realized, as the little lady held out a slender, welcoming hand to her, in the shadowy parlour, that the picture was consistent, with a consistency delicately aloof from that achieved by the modern lover of antiques, who ransacks second-hand shops for old mahogany, and its appropriate accompaniments and tries to create an atmosphere with his adopted Lares and Penates.

"This is Miss Carewe?" a thin, sweet voice inquired; and, as the gentle, near-sighted eyes came close enough to Belinda's face to see it clearly, a surprise, tinged faintly with distress, dawned in them.

"Oh, my dear, you're *very* young," Mrs. Nicholson said with a soft little flutter in her voice and manner; but she still held Belinda's hand and now she patted it reassuringly as though she wished it understood that personally she had no prejudice against extreme youth.

"No, really, I'm not," Belinda protested. "I'm much older than I look. You can't call twenty-five *very* young Mrs. Nicholson."

"Twenty-five? Really? One wouldn't dream it,

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child. I married at sixteen and I had lost two children and my husband before I was twenty-five. No, that's not young, as years go, but somehow or other I fancied you quite a spinster. The responsibility of taking a party abroad, you know. Such an undertaking! I supposed only a woman of years would have the courage. But the young people are wonderful nowadays — quite wonderful. I always tell my nephew that. He's really amazing himself, though I don't find that young men have changed so much since my day as young girls have. My nephew is very much like his great-uncle — my husband — only his manners are not so good. Don't you find that the young men nowadays lack polish, my dear? — but then you haven't their grandfathers to measure them by as I have."

She relinquished Belinda's hand to cross the room and touch a bell.

"You will lunch with me of course — oh, but that is quite understood. I couldn't allow you to go away without luncheon. Susan will take your coat and hat. Oh, yes, do take off your hat. I can't at all accept this modern idea of lunching with one's hat on. There's such an air of haste about it — as if one were leaving at the very earliest opportunity. Everything seems hurried now, doesn't it? I lose my breath whenever I go outside of my own gate."

The maid who had answered the bell was late Irish —

entirely out of the picture. Mrs. Nicholson admitted her consciousness of the false note by a deprecatory smile as the girl carried off Belinda's coat and hat.

"It is difficult to get any one," she explained regretfully. "My cook has been with me ever since I married, but my man died some time ago. He had been my father's butler and was old — eighty-six I believe. I find that waitresses and chambermaids marry so persistently and now one takes what one can get. Susan is a good girl but she doesn't understand the mahogany. I really have to attend to the dining table myself. I'm glad you took off your hat, my dear. You have such pretty hair."

Seated on a Heppelwhite chair, with deferential consideration for its spidery legs, Belinda was beaming her blissful content and restraining an unruly desire to arise and forcibly hug the little old lady who sat opposite her.

"You don't mind my admiring your home," she said, half-timidly. Perhaps the young women of Mrs. Nicholson's day would have considered open admiration rude.

The mistress of the house smiled reassuringly.

"I should mind very much if you didn't admire it," she said. "It has been in the family for eight generations and all the furniture is old — very old. I am so used to it that I suppose I do not look at it quite as strangers do, but they tell me that most of it is very fine. My nephew is extravagant about it, and I fancy he knows about such

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things. Some day all this will go to him. There's no one else."

There was a touch of pathos in the words, but apparently the speaker was unconscious of it, for she smiled — the serene, cheerful little smile which Belinda came to know and love.

"I never realized before what a difference there could be between a Sheraton sofa that has grown up among its own people and a Sheraton sofa that is homesick," the girl said, half jestingly, half seriously.

"Dear lady, every piece of this furniture looks as though it had been born right here in the house. Now just suppose that sofa had been turned out into a cold world, when it was young, and had been buffeted about in incongruous settings and huddled in with the trash of a second-hand shop, and finally dragged to light by a bargain hunter."

"Oh, my dear!" expostulated Mrs. Nicholson, sending an apologetic look toward the sofa in question as though she feared its feelings might be hurt by the irreverent suggestion.

"It wouldn't be at all what it is now," Belinda went on. "Of course, one could patch up its wounds and have it refinished and set it up among real and fake antiques collected from the four corners of the earth, but it would never be itself again. Its lines would be intact but its spirit would be broken. I'll never collect old mahogany

after this visit to you, Mrs. Nicholson. Since I haven't inherited any, I'll have to marry a man who has it in his family for I shall never be quite happy until I have a house where old furniture is at home — a part of the family. That arm-chair is so humanly hospitable I can hardly keep from curtesying to it — but the corner cabinet seems a shade distant and cool — civil of course, but formal."

Mrs. Nicholson was smiling her delight. Even the younger generation, so it seemed, could be sympathetic; and she entered into her guest's whimsical mood.

"I don't think the cabinet quite approves of my going abroad with you," she murmured confidentially. "It's in the nature of an innovation, you know; and old Sheraton distrusts innovations. My furniture has been quite argumentative on the subject of this trip. Are you sure you can take care of me, my dear?"

"Positive," Belinda asserted stoutly, though her heart sank within her. She had not counted upon dainty, porcelain old ladies, in planning to show the sights of Europe to an assorted party.

"My friends think I'm foolish to want to go, at my age," Mrs. Nicholson explained with a faint flush on her delicate cheeks, "but I've always dreamed of going and there were always responsibilities to hold me here, until now. My nephew offered to take me, but I couldn't allow that, and I have very little money of my own to spend. It will

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be pleasant to go with you. I'm sure of it now that I've seen you — and you'll not find me troublesome."

"I'll find you adorable," said Belinda gently. "I've found you so already."

The flush deepened on the sweet old face, but the smile that went with it was one of pleasure.

"Youth *is* extravagant — but I like its extravagance. Come, my dear. Luncheon is served."

When, an hour later, Belinda started homeward, her hostess went down the brick walk with her and stood, for a time, talking with the girl across the low gate between the huge bushes of flowering lilac. As they lingered there, a young man, coming through the hall from the back of the house, stopped just within the shadow beyond the open front door and looked out at the picture framed by the arching branches of lilac.

A low whistle of surprise came from his lips.

"By all the gods of luck, it is! It is!" he exclaimed joyously. "Now where did the blessed old lady find her!"

He stood watching still with the surprise and delight in his eyes, until the girl turned away and walked down the road toward the village; but, when Mrs. Nicholson reached the house, she found him seated at the dining table, while Susan, with a radiant smile, was bringing the luncheon dishes back from the kitchen.

"Well, auntie," he said as he rose, and Mrs. Nicholson's smile outdid Susan's in radiance.

"My *dear* Jack! When did you come? And luncheon all cold — and such a charming girl here for luncheon with me. It would have paid you to be on time."

"I came out on the noon train, but I went over to Dawson's across the short cut to see that bull pup he's been offering me. Luncheon's quite all right, but I'm sorry to be a nuisance. Who's the girl?"

The question came in, casually, indifferently. Evidently Mr. John Courtney was uninterested but polite.

"She's Miss Carewe. My dear boy, you could have knocked me over with a feather when I saw her. I was never so surprised in my life. I hadn't expected her to be young."

"But why not?" The young man's eyes were puzzled. He had never heard Miss Carewe's name before.

"She's the young lady with whom I'm going to Europe, Jack. To conduct a party through Europe, at her age! It seems remarkable to me. I was distressed at first, but she is capable — very capable. I'm sure of it, and so delightful. I shall enjoy her almost as much as Europe. It's really a pity you didn't come earlier, Jack."

Jack assented perfunctorily. A mad idea had sprung up, full-fledged, in his brain and he was inwardly arguing with it.

He had said he must meet her again.. There wasn't another face in the world like hers. Why even she

admitted that it was a satisfactory face — he laughed suddenly to his aunt's bewilderment.

“What is it, Jack?”

“Nothing — just a funny thing I happened to remember — apropos of Europe.”

Well, here was his chance. Why not take it? She'd probably detest him because he had seen her and heard her in the orchard — but somebody had said that it was well to begin with a little aversion and in three months — surely, without self-confidence a fellow might expect to make some headway in three months.

“Yes, thank you, Aunt Florilla — two lumps, please.”

Mrs. Nicholson looked mildly displeased. She had been obliged to ask him twice whether he would take sugar in his tea. His manners were certainly not what his great-uncle's manners had been.

CHAPTER THREE

THE UNPLEASANT OLD PARTY SURPRISES HIS AUNT

Two days after Belinda's visit to Winsted, she received a letter written in a man's hand and upon hotel stationery. She hurried to Miss Barnes's room with it at the close of school.

"Margaret, here's another eleventh-hour sacrifice. Mr. John Courtney wants to join my party, of which he has heard through relatives, and if I can make room for him will I kindly tell him when we will sail and let him know what amount to remit to me. Apparently his mind is quite made up. It's only a question of will I, won't I. He doesn't seem to care what the trip will cost."

"Probably his relatives have told him the terms."

"Yes, I suppose that's it. Funny he didn't mention who they are—as references, you know. He says, though, that I may write to the President of the First National Bank if I require references."

"You'd better do it," advised Miss Barnes.

"Useless, my dear; perfectly useless. His wanting to go with us is a guarantee that he's old and doddering and guileless. If he had initiative enough to be bad,

wild horses couldn't force him into such a party. Probably he's dreadful. I love old ladies but I don't like old men. They're usually peevish. I suppose it's because a man isn't trained to resignation as a woman is and when he finally has to give up it goes hard with him. And then old ladies get neater and neater and old men get untidier and untidier. I won't have him!"

"Belinda, you can't afford to throw away the money—and he'll hobnob with Mr. Perkins."

"That's a fact. Perhaps two will be better than one. They can quarrel with each other. I'll write to Mr. John Courtney and tell him that he's a horrid old thing and that I already detest him but that I'll put up with him for the sake of his money and please send check."

A letter was written and by return mail came the required check. A week later, Belinda sent to Mr. Courtney a second epistle, business-like, typewritten, dictated by Miss Barnes, inclosing luggage tags for cabin and hold and giving minute and explicit directions concerning luggage, sailing date, place of meeting, steamer rugs, overshoes, underwear, raincoat and letter of credit.

"You must always go upon the assumption that they aren't capable of attending to the slightest detail for themselves," Miss Barnes explained. "It's the only way to avoid trouble."

And Jack Courtney, sitting in the smoking room at the Knickerbocker Club, read the conscientious letter

of instruction with increasing joy, not unmixed with apprehension.

"For a chap who's crossed at least once a year for the last ten years and spends a good share of his time in London and Paris, this is rather a rum go," he said gaily to himself. Then his smile faded.

"But if she finds out that I *have* knocked around Europe a lot, there'll be the devil to pay. I may get around the orchard episode but I'd never be able to square that. I'll have to fix Aunt Florilla the moment I meet her or she'll queer the whole thing."

If, on the fifteenth of June, anything short of battle, murder or sudden death would have excused Belinda Carewe from sailing for Europe on the sixteenth, the young woman would have taken advantage of the excuse and abandoned her party to its fate. Cowardice descended upon her like a garment and she shamelessly confessed that she would welcome any accident, not fatal, that would save her from the task she had voluntarily assumed.

"Blue funk, Margaret! That's what it is. I never knew what it was like before. My throat's dry and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth and my flesh creeps and my hair sits up. How I ever allowed myself to get into such a scrape, I can't see. I'm too noble to tell you you are the responsible party, but really you oughtn't to have allowed me to rush on to my doom. I'm

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scared blue." Miss Barnes administered comfort and encouragement as best she could, and as the hour for sailing approached the mercurial Young Person's spirits rose.

"After all, it isn't so bad. I'm used to the two girls and Mrs. Nicholson's a love and Mrs. Bagby seemed awfully sensible, and the Perkinses are nice old souls even if he has a liver. Mr. Courtney's the unknown quantity and there's no use in being afraid of a man at any age. They're susceptible to proper treatment anywhere between the cradle and the grave. I'm actually beginning to enjoy the situation, Margaret, but hold my hand until I'm on the boat so that I can't possibly get panicky at the last moment and run away."

It was a smiling, self-possessed young person who greeted the various members of the Carewe party as they came up the gang-plank, showed them their state-rooms and their steamer chairs, had their rugs and pillows properly bestowed and made herself agreeable to friends and relatives of her charges.

"All here except Mr. Courtney," she said, at last, consulting her watch. "I asked him to come early, but I suppose he has been detained." There was a faint anxiety in her face but she valiantly suppressed it. A few moments later the first "all ashore" warning sounded and the crowd began to flock off the boat, urged by anxious and energetic stewards. There was a babel of good-

byes, a chorus of sobs and laughter, all the confusion and humour and pathos that inevitably attend a mid-season sailing, but Belinda was oblivious to the crowd around her. The anxiety on her face had deepened, her eyes were fixed eagerly on the carriage entrance to the dock.

"What will I do if he's left behind?" she demanded desperately of Miss Barnes, as that friendly prop and bulwark reluctantly turned her face shoreward. "I've got his money and his tickets and everything."

"I'll send him on the *Lucania* next Saturday. You'll have to meet him and fix up the money proposition with him. If he won't go alone, I'll cable you and you can return his money to me."

"Gang-plank going!" shouted an officer.

Belinda seized his arm, as Miss Barnes fled shoreward.

"Oh, please," she wailed. "Is it really? One of my party hasn't come yet."

The man relented, as he looked at the face turned up to his.

"Ten minutes yet, Miss; but we've got to get this mob off, somehow."

Five minutes sped by. The passengers now were crowded along the rail, waving adieux and shouting last words to friends ashore. Belinda stood between Amelia Bowers and Laura May Lee. They were laughing, blowing kisses, throwing flowers to a group of friends

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below; but she gazed over the heads of the crowd toward the shore end of the dock. Two minutes passed. There were only three minutes left now. The man could not make it. There was no chance for him.

And, just as she abandoned hope, a cab dashed through the gateway and down the dock, the crowd scattering before it, the police shouting futile warnings. For an instant Belinda hoped again, but the hope perished miserably as a tall, broad-shouldered young man sprang out of the cab, handed some money to the driver with a laughing word of thanks, saw his trunk and bags safely on the shoulders of waiting stewards, and followed the men up the gang-plank, which was promptly lowered behind him.

The ship throbbed, quivered, slipped slowly away from the mass of upturned faces; and Belinda Carewe sat limply down on a steamer chair, making a prodigious effort to look cheerful.

Mrs. Nicholson, Mrs. Bagby, the Perkinses, brother and sister, had already gone down to their staterooms to don steamer clothes. Amelia and Laura May still hung over the rail sending pantomime messages. Belinda felt very much alone, very small, very miserable, very incompetent. Not an atom of her buoyant self-confidence was left to her.

And to this woeful young woman, in the brown travelling coat, came the strapping young man who had boarded

the steamer at the last moment. She did not notice him until he was standing before her, but when she did look up at him something familiar in his face caught her gaze and held it. For a moment her memory fumbled vainly. Then the scent of apple blossoms stole oddly upon the salt sea air and she remembered. This was the Odious Creature! On the heels of this consciousness came the realization that he was speaking to her.

"Miss Carewe, I believe?" he said courteously, as he lifted his cap. "My name is Courtney, John Courtney."

Belinda sat staring at him, dumb and breathless, a slow crimson creeping into her cheeks, incredulous amazement flooding her eyes. The thing was unbelievable, overwhelming. Indignation boiled up in her soul. She had been tricked, deceived.

"By whom?" Reason inquired pertinently, and her fury collapsed. After all, the man hadn't told her that he was old and doddering. She had jumped to conclusions. But why — why should a man of this type join a party like hers, and what could she do with him now that he was there? It was absurd to think that his glimpse of her in the orchard could have anything to do with the situation. She was not vain enough to give more than a fleeting thought to that theory. The thing was evidently a coincidence, an abominable, maddening coincidence.

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Probably he would not remember her at all, would not associate her with the orchard episode. There was not even a flicker of recognition in his frank, smiling eyes.

"I hope my late arrival didn't worry you," he was saying cheerfully. "A business matter held me up at the last moment and we had to make a record dash down from the office."

"I had quite given you up," said the girl in the chair, and despite heroic effort, her voice sounded weak and wobbly.

To conduct a thing like this over the face of Europe! It was impossible — ridiculous!

But to Mr. Courtney, the proposition apparently seemed natural and reasonable.

"Our chairs are all here, together?" he inquired, with a tinge of deference in his tone — the deference due to authority. "That's very nice. If you don't mind, I'll just move mine and put it beside my aunt's. Mrs. Nicholson is my great-aunt, you know. I've planned to surprise her. Could you tell me where I would find her?"

Once more sheer amazement elicited a little gasp from the girl in the steamer chair. The theory of coincidence was shaken — shattered. He had seen her in Winsted. He must have known. Again Reason plunged into the breach. The man's aunt was an angel. A desire to please her, to be with her, was a plausible explanation for

a devoted nephew's joining the party — and yet — and yet ——

“Mrs. Nicholson has gone down to her stateroom. Number 104. She will be delighted, I am sure.”

Mr. Courtney bowed.

“If you'll excuse me, I'll run down and see her. I'm by way of being maudlin over Aunt Florilla. She wouldn't go abroad with me, so I decided to go abroad with her and it seemed to me it would be very jolly to have no responsibility about things — not but what I shall be delighted to be of use to you at any time, Miss Carewe.”

“Thank you.”

The tone was frosty — even hostile. Was there a wicked twinkle in the eyes that looked down at her? The voice and manner were above suspicion, but those eyes ——

Mr. Courtney ignored the cold weather signals.

“I suppose the whole thing is an old story to you, though,” he said airily. “You know the ropes so well. My aunt has been most enthusiastic about your capabilities. You'll enjoy Aunt Florilla. She's all to the good. Stateroom 104 you said?”

He turned away with a debonair wave of his cap, and Belinda watched him go swinging along the deck, followed by admiring glances from the women whom he passed. He certainly was a good-looking creature in a big, clean-

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cut, Gibsony way; but when Belinda tried to see herself attending to his luggage and paying his carfare, and hiring cabs for him, and buying his railway tickets, imagination failed her.

"I can't. I really can't," she said to herself helplessly — and then added, with swift inconsistency, "but if he interferes and upsets plans and tries to do things for his aunt and himself, I won't stand it — not for a minute. He's come out to be personally conducted and personally conducted he's going to be."

For a woman who has spent sixty-five years in a large Colonial house, full of closets, first acquaintance with a very small, two-berth stateroom has its problems. Mrs. Nicholson was wrestling with a few of these problems when interrupted by a tap on the door.

"Come in," she called promptly, then temporized. "At least come in as far as you can. The trunk just won't go back under the berth and there isn't room for anybody, when the trunk's out. If you're the steward, maybe you can do something about it."

The door opened until it struck the mutinous steamer trunk and a man thrust his head through the opening and eyed the little lady perched up on the narrow sofa with her feet crossed under her.

"There isn't even room for my feet on the floor while the trunk is out," she explained. "Can you get in far enough to do anything about it? Why!" Her eyes

widened; she felt for her glasses and adjusted them.

"Why!" she repeated feebly. "Why, Jack Courtney!"

"Hello, Auntie," said the head. "I'm going abroad with you."

Mrs. Nicholson untucked her feet and rested them recklessly in the trunk tray.

"Jack, you can't. I'm in a party."

"So am I."

"What party?"

"Miss Carewe's."

"What!"

The little lady leaned back against the wall, overcome by emotion.

"Did Miss Carewe know?"

"Well, she knew I was in her party but she didn't know I was your nephew. I wanted to surprise you."

"You have," admitted his aunt.

"You might kiss a chap who's given up his business and come to sea just to surprise you," suggested the head reproachfully. "Aren't you pleased?"

"Why of course I am, my dear boy. Of course I am, It's perfectly delightful, only I'm so amazed. I don't see — Miss Carewe did say something about a recent addition to the party. She mentioned him to-day. He was late, I believe. But he was old — quite an old, feeble gentleman, and *very* unpleasant. At least I gathered as much from what she said about him."

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"I'm the feeble, unpleasant old party."

"But, Jack dear, did you tell her —— ?"

"I didn't tell her anything except that I wanted to join the party. She must have gathered the rest from my epistolary style."

"If you could get further in, dear, I think I could understand better. There's something confusing about talking to a head that hasn't any body. If you could get hold of the trunk handle at that end and lift and push, and I should take this handle and shove — there! It's going. Oh, that *is* better. Come in now and let me see if it really is you. Don't muss my hair, child. Do you know you really are very nice looking — not so handsome as your great-uncle, but then he was exceptional. Have you seen Miss Carewe?"

"She told me where to find you."

"Wasn't *she* surprised?"

Jack Courtney grinned.

"She was."

"Why, of course, when she was expecting a very old gentleman — but Jack, was she pleased?"

"Oh, as to that — modesty forbids."

"Of course, when she knows you — but just at first, to have a young gentleman drop into her party so unexpectedly. She's really only a girl, you know — and so pretty. Didn't you think her very pretty?"

"Fairish," admitted Mr. Courtney without enthusiasm.

"I'd call her more than that, much more than that. You can be of great assistance to her, I should think. You've spent so much time in Europe that ——

Her nephew interrupted her.

"That's just what I wanted to talk to you about, Auntie. You see what I'm going to Europe for this time is to be with you and see that you're properly taken care of and amused. I don't care anything about the bally old sights or hotels or trains. Now, if Miss Carewe knew that I'd been all over the ground and lived abroad a good deal she might imagine that I'd be critical — that I wouldn't like the way she was doing things — that I knew more about it than she did. You see? That would be embarrassing and uncomfortable all around. I don't want her to know that I've been over more than once before — just a hurried trip. That one trip will save us if she catches us tripping — so to speak. You'll keep mum, won't you, Auntie? That's a duck."

"But, Jack, I might forget ——"

"No you won't. Just shy the subject if it ever comes up and I'll do the rest. I'll allow myself to be led around like a pet lamb and I won't volunteer advice or assistance unless asked for it. It's a very harmless little conspiracy, you see. Just a matter of a few reservations for the sake of making Miss Carewe feel comfortable."

"Very well, dear. It's kind of you, of course. And it's very nice to have you, very. I have the greatest

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confidence in Miss Carewe, the greatest; but if anything does go wrong there's something about a man, you know. I suppose that's an old-fashioned idea, but then I'm an old-fashioned person, and quite aside from any question of emergencies, it's a great happiness to have you with me, my boy. It will add wonderfully to my pleasure in this trip I've waited for so many years. I do appreciate your thoughtfulness, dear."

Jack Courtney's conscience felt a distinct twinge as he bent over and kissed the thin white hand that patted his coat lapel and yet, after all, if his Aunt Florilla had not been, as he had led her to suppose, the motive power behind this journey of his, it would be good to be with her. There was no one in the world quite like Aunt Florilla.

"This turban, Jack. They told me it would be just the thing for the steamer, but I don't know. It looks a little bit girlish, don't you think — just a trifle?"

He smiled into the anxious face.

"It's exactly right; exactly."

"And I brought a dinner dress particularly for the steamer. I read in one of the Sunday papers that people were very dressy on the steamers now; but my clothes will be ruined, simply ruined. There isn't a place to put anything except tooth brushes and combings. Mrs. Bagby has to have one hook, of course, and I don't seem able to settle anything. So many people

gave me things to use on the steamer. My bag's full of them, but there isn't any place to put them."

Her nephew laughed.

"Let me at them. I'll get you ship-shape here in no time."

He did. Then he took his aunt up on deck, tucked her into her chair, was introduced to Mr. and Miss Perkins and Mrs. Bagby, made a few polite, inconsequential remarks to Miss Carewe and strolled off toward the bow of the boat, leaving Mrs. Nicholson telling the story of her surprise and joy.

"He's like my own son," she said as she ended the tale, "and he has no mother and father of his own, so I suppose I've meant a great deal to him."

Belinda, nestling gloomily among her steamer cushions, tried to pump up a glow of sympathy with the proud aunt's happiness and failed.

Mr. John Courtney was a white elephant on her hands and — well, it wasn't normal for a young man to carry devotion to a great-aunt so far. And there was that obnoxious apple orchard.

Amelia and Laura May came skurrying along the deck, bareheaded, pretty, effervescent, bubbling over with excitement.

"Oh, Miss Carewe, isn't it perfectly dandy?" Amelia began when she came within hearing distance. "The Yale cricket team is on board and Tommy Shallcross —

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Lizzie's brother — is in it. We just met him and he's going to introduce all the other boys to us. And we've been trying to make out which is Count Bertrand de Brissac. There's a kind of pea-green, thin-looking man with a little black moustache, but we can't decide whether he's noble or just sick. There's a baron on the passenger list, too, but, some way or other, I never could get interested in barons. They always sound sort of old and fat and blond. Don't they to you, Laura May? Counts sound so much slenderer and darker. There's a perfectly scrumptious man on the other side of the boat, talking to one of the officers, but he's just American. You can get Americans at home. What I want to meet is somebody with feudal halls and ancestors and moated granges and things. I hope they aren't all pea-green — the foreign noblemen, I mean."

"Well, I've got an idea that they're mostly yellow," said Mrs. Bagby in her vigorous, positive way, "but we always kept American help on the farm so I don't know much, at first hand, about furriners."

"I'd like a lord better than anything except a duke — and dukes are awfully scarce," Laura May announced reflectively. "They aren't so romantic as French and Italians and Spanish but they're solider, and then you wouldn't have to learn another language. I do loathe irregular verbs."

"Well, there's a fair chance that the verbs wouldn't

be the only irregular things you'd run across, if you married a furrin nobleman," Mrs. Bagby said encouragingly. "As far as I can find out from the divorce court reports you can get just as many interesting ideas on matrimony in English as you can in any of the dago languages. You'd better stick to the Yale cricket team, girls. If they was a good, old-fashioned baseball team, they'd be just that much better."

Amelia dissented promptly. "Oh, I think cricket's perfectly fine. Tommy's going to play polo in England, too. He's got his ponies along. He says he'll get us cards for Hurlingham and Ranelagh. They're swell polo places. Isn't it just the luckiest thing, Miss Carewe? We're going down to get some of our chocolates."

"You may tell Mr. Shallcross to introduce his friends to your chaperon," Miss Carewe said, with a certain genial firmness in which the girls of the Ryder School had always recognized finality. "I'll see about their meeting you afterward."

Consternation appeared on the two girlish faces.

"Why, Miss Carewe," remonstrated Amelia, "that's just like school. People don't have to be so awfully formal on ships. When Bessie Allen went over, everybody came right up and spoke to her. She had a perfectly grand time. Two men proposed to her, the fifth day out. She says when she goes again she's going to take a slow boat. She doesn't like these ocean greyhounds

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a bit. Six days is such a short time — but I think two in five days is pretty good, don't you?"

"My dear," Miss Carewe had risen to her feet and now tucked a friendly arm through Amelia's, "I've seen too many ill-bred American girls making themselves common and ridiculous on board ship to be willing that my two nice girls should imitate them. "Of course, if you want to be taken for saloon-keeper's daughters from Chicago —— "

"Mercy, no; but Bessie —— "

"Bessie made a mistake. I'm here to keep you from making mistakes."

"And there's the Count. There won't be any one to introduce him."

"If he wants an introduction, he'll find a way to get one."

"Tommy might offer him a cigar or a drink or something and get acquainted — only Tommy doesn't know any real language — just college slang. A French count couldn't understand that."

Mrs. Bagby looked up from her book.

"I sh'd say," she remarked, in her dry, Hoosier tones, "that an invitation to drink would be sort of Esperanto. I guess it'd be understood in 'most any language."

Amelia took her quite seriously.

"Oh, do you think so? Well, of course, a cigar would be nicer. Tommy oughtn't to drink anything himself

but 'most everybody does abroad and I guess one drink wouldn't make a French count any worse than he is anyway. I'll tell Tommy to try a cigar first, though."

"Come along and get those chocolates. You had pounds and pounds sent to you, didn't you?" Belinda had learned that it was easier to divert a schoolgirl's attention than to appeal to her reason. Amelia rose to the bait.

"Arthur Bentley sent me ten pounds! Isn't he the extravagant wretch? He'll be perfectly furious when he finds out that Tommy was on the boat. I must write him a postal. Oh, I haven't written any of my postals. I've promised loads. Where's the writing room, Miss Carewe? I mustn't forget to ——"

Her voice floated back faintly, as girls and chaperon disappeared through an open door. Mrs. Bagby smiled at Mrs. Nicholson over her spectacles. "Miss Carewe's got her work cut out for her with that one," she said. "The other girl is quiet and teachable enough, but this Amelia just naturally gravitates toward trouble."

Mrs. Nicholson smiled too, but her smile was of different quality — less critical, more tolerant.

"Youth, my dear Mrs. Bagby, youth! Girls were different when I was young, but who knows whether it isn't just as well to allow the foolishness to come to the surface — on the safety valve principle, you know. We dreamed a good deal about boys in my day and talked

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about them comparatively little, but three of my dear friends eloped before they were eighteen — girls from excellent families. Two of them were very unhappy later. It might have been better if they had talked more foolishness and dreamed less.”

Mrs. Bagby nodded.

“I suppose I don’t know much about it,” she said, with a retrospective look in her unbeautiful, likeable face. “There never was much romance along my path for me to go squashing through. If there had been maybe I’d a-splashed around in it as much as anybody, but there were always younger children and I was kept mighty busy helping ma. There wasn’t any time for boys while I was schoolgirl age, and then when I got out of school, there wasn’t any boys. That is, none to count; I just married one of the neighbours’ boys because it was marrying time and he was there. Not but what Jonas was a good husband. He was good, according to his lights, and we was happy — as married folks go. There wasn’t never any words between us. A farmer and his wife don’t see very much of each other except in the winter, ’n’ in the evenings Jonas was mostly asleep. That’s why I read such a lot of books. Somebody gave us a library of travel when we was married and I got such a taste for them books, I could hardly wait to get done my work before I’d settle down to reading about China or Rooshia or some other heathen country. If more

farmers wives 'd get worked up over reading about furrin parts, the insane asylums wouldn't be so full of them. It gives you something to think about, especially where there ain't any children. Jonas thought I was plumb silly to be stuffing my head with nonsense about countries outside of Indiana. He allowed that some day he'd like to go up to Indianapolis and see the State House, but he wasn't very partickler even about doing that, an' he couldn't see what I'd want to go gallivantin' around for.

"He worked hard on that farm, Jonas did. So did I, but women folks don't get much credit for their share of farm work. Jonas was terrible saving, too. He didn't hold with buying a blessed thing we could live without. Maybe he'd have lived longer if he'd spent a little more and worked a little less as he went along, but he couldn't see it that way, and last winter he took cold — he wouldn't have a doctor at first. Said it was just throwing money in the fire; so he took some patent medicine for rheumatism that we happened to have in the house and the first thing we knew he was so sick the doctor couldn't do anything for him."

Mrs. Nicholson's gentle face was tremulous with sympathy, but Mrs. Bagby went on cheerfully.

"After the funeral, I found there was a good deal more money than I'd had any idea of, so I just sold the farm and set out to see some of them travel sights. Seems kind of mean to be doing it with Jonas's money, don't

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it? He was close, Jonas was — and he wasn't sentimental, not even when he was courting."

The dainty old lady with the soft white hair and the rose-leaf cheeks and the smiling eyes, in which the ghost of girlhood lingered, looked at the sturdy old lady with the scant sandy locks, the leathery, wrinkled, sensible face and the frank, shrewd eyes into which no golden memories brought a cheating glow of youth. There was distress upon the gentle, delicate face of the woman who had been loved and cherished; the vague distress of one suddenly confronted by the fact that all the world is not attuned to beauty. Compared with Mrs. Nicholson's own love story, this bald, suggestive history of Mrs. Bagby's loomed drearily tragic; and yet Mrs. Bagby was no tragic figure and would have been blankly amazed had she fathomed the passionate pity in the heart of the little woman beside her. Personally, she regarded herself as distinctly fortunate. Matrimonial blessedness is very much a matter of ideals and the number of women who consider themselves happily married because their husbands do not quarrel or drink is considerably larger than that of the women whose married life is pure poetic rhapsody.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN AGREEABLE FRENCHMAN DISARRANGES CERTAIN WELL-LAID PLANS

A STIFF breeze and a high sea are foes to sentiment, and both were awaiting the *Adriatic* outside the Hook. Mrs. Bagby abandoned retrospection in favour of lively and disturbing anticipation. Mrs. Nicholson forgot her companion's barren life and her own rose-hued romance in fluttering effort to face a present crisis. Belinda coming up on deck found the two women huddled miserably under their steamer rugs and looking oddly alike. Pink and white face and sallow face were both sicklied o'er with a faint green. Neat turban and fore-and-aft cap were set at similar rakish angles. Seasickness is the great leveller. A bird's-eye view of the deck revealed long lines of chairs occupied by what appeared to be heaps of old clothes. Unfeeling favourites of the gods tramped up and down past their afflicted fellow-voyagers, beaming exultantly, glorying in their own immunity. Never was a soul so great that it could genuinely and painfully sympathize with a seasickness it did not share.

"Why, my dears! You're not sick already?" queried

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Miss Carewe with conspicuous lack of the tact for which she was famous. The two women did not show their resentment in words, but their reproachful eyes spoke volumes and Belinda awoke to her responsibilities.

"Oh, I'm so dreadfully sorry. I'll get you some lemons. No? Well, maybe a little champagne — no, of course not, if you feel that way about it. You'll feel better before long if you keep quiet."

Utter unbelief was written on the two miserable faces.

"If I could get to bed," murmured Mrs. Nicholson feebly.

"I'd stay in the fresh air if I could," urged Belinda. "It doesn't last, you know. That's the only good thing about it. You'll feel perfectly fine when it's all over."

"I'd hate to be rude to you Miss Carewe," said Mrs. Bagby with a grim twinkle in her eyes, "but if you make many more remarks of that encouraging sort, I'll forget my manners. I think I'm going to part with them anyway."

Belinda changed the subject.

"Where are Mr. and Miss Perkins?" she asked.

"They've gone down and so far as I know they're the only things travelling in that direction." Mrs. Bagby had the air of one who jests at the cannon's mouth.

"Don't you ever get seasick?" she asked with a touch of resentment.

"Never." The cheerful promptness of the answer evidently jarred upon the sufferer's nerves.

"Well, go away," she commanded in a tone of deep disgust. "Go away and look well some place else. You aggravate me."

She pulled her rug up around her head, and Belinda, obeying orders, walked briskly down the deck. Leaning over the railing to look at the steerage crowd she was joined by Mr. Courtney. Even before she looked up and before he spoke she knew who it was and checked a swift impulse to turn away. There was no use in dodging a man who was travelling in one's own party. Resignation was the only possible attitude.

"Corking day for a starter, isn't it?" the unwelcome He remarked genially. "Everybody feeling fit in our crowd?"

"Our!" Belinda resented the bracketing and admitted the accuracy of it.

"The girls are all right, but your aunt and Mrs. Bagby and the Perkins are feeling rather wretched."

"Aunt Florilla? That's too bad. Is she in bed?"

"No; I advised her to stick it out on deck for a while."

"That's right. I'll go and have a look at her. No use asking you whether you're a good sailor. You look the part. Oh, I say, Miss Carewe, what's the matter?"

A wave of greenish pallor had swept over her face. A sudden sickly horror dawned in her eyes. She started

to hurry away, then stopped and clutched the arm of the Unpleasant Party. The deck billowed under her, the sky shut in upon her, the sea went over her. She clung desperately to John Courtney. She even allowed her reeling head to drop upon his coat collar. If he had been one of the stokers she would have done the same. One second of seasickness can upset the conventions of a lifetime and there was no room for personal pique and prejudices in this new seething, chaotic, nightmare world.

Mr. Courtney promptly put his arm around her and deposited her in the nearest vacant chair. The episode wakened not even a mild flutter of interest in the occupants of the neighbouring chairs. They had troubles of their own.

"I never knew it was like this," groaned Belinda. Her voice had a dying fall and the eyes she turned up toward the big man who leaned over her were utterly forlorn.

"I've *laughed* at it!" she added penitently.

The man smiled encouragingly.

"It won't last," he began; "you'll feel fine when ——"

She waved a limp, protesting hand at him.

"Go away. Go away. I know how Mrs. Bagby felt about it now. I wish I'd sent those poor things down to their berths. That's the place for anybody who's seasick."

"No really, Miss Carewe, the fresh air ——"

"I loathe fresh air. I wouldn't stay here a minute if I could walk. U-g-h!"

A long shudder swept over her. When it passed she opened her eyes again.

"Go and see about them. Please do. They may be dead. I didn't have the faintest idea they were feeling this way. Get the deck steward for them — and our stewardess — and the doctor. It would be awful if anything should happen to them."

"Couldn't you come along to your own chair?"

She made a gesture with both hands, as though pushing him away.

"All I want is to be let alone — to — be — let — completely — alone — until — I — am — dead! But they've got to be personally conducted. They've paid for it."

She collapsed in a despairing heap, and the man, heroically suppressing a grin, pulled off his long ulster and threw it over her.

"I'll send you a rug. Don't worry about Aunt Flo-rilla and Mrs. Bagby. I'll fix them up."

She did not thank him. She was not grateful to him. She didn't even dislike him. He was a thing in a bad dream. Only seasickness was real. The deck steward came with the rug at an opportune moment when there was a slight cessation of hostilities, and with his help

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Belinda made her way to her stateroom where she was handed over to the tender mercies of a stern English stewardess and where she lay in her berth for forty-eight hours, visited at intervals by Laura and May and Amelia, who reported Mrs. Bagby on deck the second morning Mrs. Nicholson, comfortable in her stateroom but unambitious, the Perkinses lost to sight and Mr. Courtney "perfectly dandy."

As the personal conductor's physical discomfort decreased her mental discomfort grew apace. She had started out by flat failure. Probably she would keep it up. She had literally thrown herself into the Unpleasant Party's arms and turned her duties over to him. Heaven alone knew what Amelia and Laura May were doing on deck, unhampered by chaperonage. On the third morning of the voyage Belinda, still a trifle pallid and shaky, made her appearance on deck in the wake of the rug-laden deck steward. Seven vacant chairs stood in line beyond the one into which she sank; but in the offing, she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Bagby promenading with a fat woman in a loud plaid coat and up near the bow a man who looked like Mr. Courtney was standing with the captain and another officer. As she settled comfortably into a chair, Amelia's clear, high, treble came gaily to her ears, and a moment later the girl herself appeared with a man at her heels. Belinda took in the man at a glance and inwardly wondered. This was

certainly no member of the Yale cricket team — this handsome foreign-looking man with the distinguished air and the bold, smiling eyes. The eyes were smiling at Amelia and the girl's face was radiant with excitement and elation. As she caught sight of Belinda, the radiance was suddenly bedimmed, but she headed straight for the chaperon's chair and stopped in front of it.

"Miss Carewe, this is Count de Brissac. Tommy introduced him yesterday. He introduced all the team too. I'd have waited, only you know there wasn't any telling how long you were going to be sick and it didn't seem as if we ought to go on missing all the fun."

Miss Carewe laughed at the breathless confession and apology. So did Count de Brissac.

"I am of the fun? Yes?" he asked in carefully spoken English.

"Oh, you're great fun," Amelia assured him frankly.

"I am honoured," he said gravely, with a profound bow.

"All new acquaintances are a part of the fun, Count de Brissac."

Belinda was civil, but a slight coolness in her tone and manner offset Amelia's exuberant friendliness.

"Miss Bowers is feeling guilty because she has been making such acquaintances without the usual preliminary of the stranger's introduction to her chaperon."

A shade of surprise flitted over the Count's expressive face.

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“Ah! You have also then these traditions in America? I had thought that everything was of an informality there, of a freedom; that the young ladies were not chaperoned.”

“We have our social classes and they have their own traditions.”

Miss Carewe's tone might have been read to imply that the Count had been unhappy in the strata of American society which he had frequented. Perhaps she was conscious of its edge, for she added quickly:

“But many of our girls are not chaperoned carefully and behave badly both at home and abroad, so your mistake was natural enough. Only generalizations are never safe, are they?”

He bowed again, a courteous, deferential, disarming bow, which left Belinda wondering why American men always bowed as though it were a painful duty rather than a polite accomplishment.

“And now I have met the chaperon and may begin over again?” he asked, with a smile more disarming than the bow. “I may sit down and become acquainted with the chaperon?”

Amelia looked surprised and hurt. This was chaperoning raised to the *n*th degree; but, at the moment, Laura and May and four attendant youths in college sweaters hove within sight and diverted her attention.

“Going to bowl cricket on the lower deck. Come

along," chorussed the four boys, thereby showing a forgiving spirit, for the fickle Amelia had incontinently thrown over her more youthful admirers for the Count as soon as the latter had been presented.

She hesitated, looked at the titled one. He was looking at Belinda. Amelia tossed her pretty head and turned away, throwing a cool, "You'll excuse me?" over her shoulders. It was all very well to be polite to a chaperon, but one didn't have to make eyes at her.

The Count turned and looked after her as she went.

"Your American girls are of an amazing prettiness," he said, "and of a charm too. I cannot get used to them. They surprise me constantly. Even at so young an age they are so confident, so self-reliant. There is no shyness and yet they are so fresh, so ingenuous. I admire them extravagantly, Mademoiselle Carewe, and I struggle to understand the American point of view, but that is difficult for a Frenchman. You have ideas so quaint — that in order to meet one young girl, one must first be presented to another young girl. Forgive me that I smile. The chaperon with us is of so different a type — no more capable. I am sure of that, but she — what is it you Americans say? — she looks the part."

He was smiling so good-naturedly that offended dignity refused to come at Belinda's call and she laughed.

"I'm years older than Amelia and I've been her teacher in boarding school for three years, so she is used to think-

ing that I'm as ancient as the Pyramids. She would be absolutely amazed if she should hear me called a girl. Don't do anything to undermine my authority, Count de Brissac. Respect the gray hairs I ought to have."

"Ah! You have taught these young ladies? And now you take them abroad?"

"I have a party of seven."

"You have the courage of a veteran, Mademoiselle Carewe, if not the gray hair — but I have seen only two of those young things."

"Five of the party are grown-ups."

"What a pity! I should like to see seven such girls together. It would be to hear the music of the fountain of Immortal Youth. Miss Bowers is from the South of your great country — so she tells me."

"From Georgia. If you were an American you would know her father, E. K. Bowers."

"Oh, but even a foreigner also. He is the sugar king. It is so they call him, is it not? He is a power, this Monsieur Bowers — and with millions. I wonder that his daughter does not travel *en princesse*, with a retinue."

Belinda shook her head.

"They are very simple people. Nothing could persuade Mr. Bowers to cross the ocean himself, but he was willing to trust Amelia to me. He would amuse you. It is only in America, I fancy, that one finds just such rough diamonds."

But the Count's interest in the Bowers family had ebbed, and the conversation shifted to other themes. Mrs. Bagby took possession of her chair and the Count was duly presented.

"Your visitation didn't last long, Mrs. Bagby," said Belinda in a congratulatory tone.

The old lady chuckled comfortably.

"No, my dear; but it was fierce while it lasted. I lay there and thought that if Jonas grudged my using his money for travelling, his spirit must be plumb tickled to see how I was getting my come-uppance. I sort of repented not sticking to his ideas; but I'm all right now. Pretty sick yourself, wa'n't you?"

"Ghastly sick," Belinda shuddered at the memory. "I'm desperately ashamed of myself. Oh, Mrs. Nicholson, I'm so glad you changed your mind and decided to come on deck. It's such a heavenly day. Count de Brissac will tuck you in. Allow me to present him."

Five minutes later the Count enjoyed the privilege of tucking Mr. Perkins and his sister into their chairs. He made himself agreeable to all the party. Even Mrs. Bagby laid aside her prejudice against foreigners; and when Jack Courtney arrived upon the scene, just ahead of the bouillon and the sandwiches, he found the Frenchman sitting upon the foot of Miss Carewe's chair and entertaining the group with a light-hearted gaiety that had evidently proved infectious.

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Mr. Courtney stared his disapproval. He had the usual sweet tolerance of the American man for the foreign man of his own class and the customary fair and broad-minded attitude of the Anglo Saxon toward men of the Latin races. All of which, tersely put, means that, while he could, by putting restraint upon himself, admit the admirable qualities of an Englishman or German, he lumped all other European men together as "dagoes" and refused to believe that they might ultimately be saved. Unintelligent, perhaps, this view, but emphatically masculine American.

To behold one of the despised outsiders received, figuratively speaking, into the bosom of the Carewe party was trying to the six foot two inches of American masculinity. To find him seated on the foot of Miss Carewe's chair and receiving from her such approving smiles as Jack in his optimistic moments had dreamed of winning for himself was the nature of an unpleasant shock.

Mr. Courtney acknowledged introduction to Count de Brissac with an air of surly disapproval. The Count was courteously genial, and by demonstrating the superiority of his manners justified the American's instantaneous dislike. There is no one we hate so cordially as the one to whom we have been inexcusably rude.

"Do you care to walk, Aunt Florilla?" the dutiful nephew asked stiffly.

"Why no, Jack dear. The Count has been telling us the most delightful things about the peasant festivals in his country. Sit down, dear. You'll be so amused."

Jack sat down but he was not amused.

The fellow talked well. He admitted that. "Too well," he added. "Actors, all of them," he thought contemptuously, as he watched the eloquent gestures, the vivid play of facial expression. That the dramatic talent might be a gift for which to thank the gods did not enter into his Anglo Saxon conception. To the average Englishman, a display of feeling is indecent. To the average American it is merely ridiculous. Jack found Count de Brissac ridiculous, or at least he tried to believe that he did; but in his heart lurked an annoying conviction that women — even sensible women — might find the man attractive. Certainly Miss Carewe was hanging upon his words, her mobile face reflecting the moods that flashed across his, her eyes alight with interest. The whole party was fascinated. Even Mr. Perkins had forgotten to be fretful and Miss Perkins had not rearranged his pillows within ten minutes.

Jack lay back in his chair, gloom sitting heavily upon his brow, and eyed the raconteur. Yes, the fellow certainly was good looking in a dago way; no whipper snapper but big, lean, sinewy, alert, a man with poise of body and brain. His teeth were too white and his eyes were too black to suit Mr. Courtney's fastidious taste; and

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as for the way he wore his moustache — no man with a moustache like that could be trusted.

The luncheon bugle sounded and the party divided itself into those who would go below and those for whom discretion was still the better part of valour. The Count went salon-ward at Belinda's side. Jack Courtney followed with Mrs. Bagby. He had shed his scowl and was outwardly amiable, but in his soul there was a profound disgust; for though his scenario had been so cleverly mapped out, his prophetic soul whispered to him that the stage management of the play was not to be left in his hands.

The days passed as days do pass on an Atlantic liner when the clerk of the weather is in friendly mood. Gradually the limp heaps of old clothes resolved themselves into vertebrate human beings, some of them presentable, a few even attractive. Acquaintances were made, cliques were formed, flirtations progressed briskly. The women decided that there was something queer about the blond widow and the affair between the doctor and the San Francisco divorcée gave rise to furious gossip. Everybody knew that the girl in the red ulster was going to Paris for her trousseau and that the quiet man with the thin lips had taken \$500 away from little Bobby Burton at poker and was suspected of being a professional card sharp. Considerable money changed hands on the pools and the concert proved a success. Amelia and Laura

May were easily the belles aboard ship, though their chaperon might have gone, as did they, surrounded by a crowd of attendant swains, if she had not stuck loyally and conscientiously to her rôle of personal conductor. She read to Mrs. Nicholson, she walked with Mrs. Bagby, she ran errands for Mr. Perkins, she waved the banner of the proprieties in the faces of Amelia's and Laura's admirers.

When, occasionally she did relax and allow herself an hour or two off duty, Count de Brissac was usually to be found at her side, though a professor from Harvard and a civil engineer from Mexico and a young millionaire from Denver and an elderly English diplomat and a fiery little mine owner from Brazil contested his claim. As for Jack Courtney, he was apparently not in the running. Miss Carewe was pleasant to him in an indifferent, non-committal way, but all effort he made to secure time alone with her proved futile; and, piqued, he fell back upon the society in the smoking room, and a dashing young woman from Kentucky. Occasionally, too, he devoted himself to Amelia and Laura May, with an elder brotherly air to which they took violent exception because of its fraternal tone.

"I don't want a man like that to *adopt* me!" complained Amelia bitterly, whenever she and Laura May talked things over. "He's perfectly gorgeous and it seems like the finger of fate, his being right in our own party; but to

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see the way he treats us, anybody'd think he'd just been brought along to wheel our perambulators. It makes me sick. Funny he and Miss Carewe don't like each other, isn't it?" And Laura May thought it was funny.

When Count de Brissac was not monopolizing Miss Carewe or helping her to amuse her flock he had a habit of seeking Amelia's society.

"She amuses me — but intensely," he said to Belinda. "I have seen nothing so young and yet so old. And her talk! There is only Monsieur Tommy whose language is more picturesque. I am enjoying this encounter with the young girl of America, Miss Carewe. It is quite new, quite refreshing."

Often he repeated whole conversations between Amelia and himself — conversations irresistibly funny in his rendering, and his utter frankness concerning the girl set her chaperon's mind at rest in regard to certain afternoons tête-à-tête and moonlight strolls. The Count was too fascinating a wolf to be turned loose among unsophisticated lambs. Belinda realized that; but she was reassured by the fact that most of Amelia's time was given to callow youth from the various educational centres of her native land, Yale, as usual, leading, though hard pressed by Princeton and frequently demoralized by the brilliant side-plays of an irrepressible lad from Williams.

Personally, Miss Carewe had no fear of wolves, not even when they looked at her with eloquent eyes and

talked subtle flattery in fluent, if over-precise, English. A young woman who has the tickets and luggage of seven pilgrims in her charge cannot afford to trifle with any feeling less serious than that of responsibility. Moreover, eye eloquence and flattery were not novelties to Belinda and left her undisturbed.

Perhaps she did encourage the Count. Wherever two or three women were gathered together upon the boat a resolution was passed setting forth the fact that she did. But on the other hand, when a young woman has been endowed by nature with absurdly long eyelashes and a smile spontaneous and dimple-haunted, it is difficult to decide where involuntary provocation ends and deliberate encouragement begins. Belinda did smile and look down, but these phenomena are not, of themselves, *prima facie* evidence of guilt, though Mr. John Courtney was pleased to regard them in that light.

She had never bothered about showing him her eyelashes. When he talked to her, she looked through him, over him, around him. Occasionally she even looked at him in a distressingly business-like, impersonal way, but nothing he had ever said had brought that droop of the lashes and that swift little smile. To be sure, he had never been able to get beyond Shakespeare and the musical glasses in conversation with her. Scheme as he would, he never succeeded in being alone with her. Not that

she avoided him. She was always frankly, cheerfully civil. He was one of her party and civility, even a certain cordiality, was in the bond; but as for any relation more personal — she apparently did not even recognize the possibility of such a thing, and the personally conducted young man alternated twixt gloom and recklessness, twixt scowling loneliness and brazen flirtation with the Kentucky brunette. Even his Aunt Florilla realized vaguely that something was wrong with him, though in devotion to her he never failed.

“I don’t think the sea agrees with Jack,” she confided to Mrs. Bagby. “Of course, he won’t admit it but I’ve an idea he’s not quite comfortable — not actually seasick, you know, but just a little stirred up.”

“It does look that way,” admitted Mrs. Bagby, with an odd flickering smile in her old eyes. For a woman of limited worldly experience, Mrs. Bagby had an amazingly accurate fashion of summing up a situation, but she knew how to hold her tongue.

“Do you know, I’m quite disappointed,” Mrs. Nicholson went on in her gentle voice. “I had thought that Miss Carewe and Jack would enjoy each other so much. She’s very pretty and Jack always liked pretty girls; and I’ve been told he was really quite popular with the ladies. Mrs. Fothergill said the women ran after him. That’s a very coarse way of putting it. I’d hate to think women would so far forget their dignity. It wouldn’t have been

possible in my day — but Mrs. Fothergill ought to know. She's quite a social leader in New York."

"They might run faster with less excuse," commented Mrs. Bagby, as she watched the Pied Piper in question come strolling along the deck.

"Well, Miss Carewe doesn't appear impressed." Mrs. Nicholson's tone was distressed, even faintly piqued. "It doesn't seem natural for a young lady to be so utterly indifferent to a nice looking young man like Jack, but perhaps it's just as well. He doesn't admire her at all. Not that he says anything disagreeable about her. He wouldn't do that for fear of hurting my feelings and making me uncomfortable; but he just shuts his mouth tight and looks like the Courtneys when I talk about her. The Courtneys were a very proud, critical family, my dear."

Mrs. Bagby, still watching the approaching young man, saw a sudden change in his face as he passed a man and a girl who were leaning on the rail side by side. The cheerful smile faded swiftly from his lips and eyes. His brows narrowed, his mouth shut like a trap.

"Had ugly dispositions, hadn't they?" the old lady remarked cheerfully.

"Beg pardon?" Mrs. Nicholson's thoughts had run on ahead.

"Oh, yes; I see. The Courtneys? Well, not ugly

dispositions, but they are masterful. They dislike being crossed."

"I can believe it," said Mrs. Bagby. The sulky back of young Mr. Courtney disappeared through the smoking-room door.

Meanwhile, Belinda had watched the sunlit sky and sea, unconscious of the passing storm. The handsome Frenchman, so voluble upon occasion, had the rare gift of an eloquent silence; but he looked at the girl beside him more constantly than at the tumbling waves and the expression on his face was an odd one in which ardour and cynicism warred. She was bewitching, this little Yankee school teacher. He had known many women, in many lands, but never one just like this one — never one with such clear, honest eyes under such seductive lashes, and above such a smiling provocative mouth; never one with so firmly moulded a chin, punctuated by so incongruous a dimple; never one so irresponsibly gay, so serenely well-poised; so appealing, so self-reliant.

He knew the rules of the game for a man and a maid. None better. But ordinary rules do not apply to human paradoxes and he was too clever a man not to recognize the exception when it confronted him. He brushed the dust of years and forgetfulness from a host of past love affairs in a search for some clue to this feminine type, but experience failed him. She was coquette to her finger-tips, the little Carewe; but so breezily, light-heart-

edly coquette and with such a fund of common sense beneath the coquetry. De Brissac had never been afraid of a woman before. He was a trifle afraid of Belinda Carewe — perhaps because when with her he was more than a trifle afraid of himself.

Those old love affairs and others not so old—Oh, well, one played at love for many different reasons. The candle was usually worth the game, but if one should stop playing, should take this matter of love seriously — he shrugged his shoulders. He, Bertrand de Brissac, at his age, to fall in love with a girl whose eyes were wells of purity and whose fortune was her face! Imbecile! And yet—and yet—— A loose strand of sunny brown hair escaped from the chiffon veil that was tied snugly over the pretty, turbaned head so near his. It fluttered in the wind. For an instant it brushed softly against his face. He drew a quick breath, his hands tightened on the rail, a dull red surged into his face, he leaned nearer to the unconscious girl by his side. Again the teasing wind brought the soft touch like a fleeting caress. Down in the man's heart something new and strange tugged at the leash of his will. It was not passion. Would that be either new or strange for him? There was sweetness in it, and a hurt, and a swift-rushing sense of shame.

She was so dear, so heavenly dear. If one could afford ——

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Belinda turned toward him suddenly and as his eyes met hers, he laughed — an unmirthful little laugh.

To marry a girl with honest, challenging eyes like those! He laughed again and the second laugh was more bitter than the first, though it rang lightly.

"What's the joke?" asked Belinda, a sympathetic smile quivering round the corners of her mouth. She was always ready to join in a laugh.

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"A poor one, Mademoiselle Carewe — and on me. You will pardon me if I do not tell it?"

She nodded.

"Of course. Horrid things, jokes on oneself. I loathe them. Sometimes I dream ghastly ones. It's the worst form of nightmare."

"I do not have dreams."

There was a curt finality in the simple remark that caught the girl's attention.

"Not even day dreams?" she asked jestingly.

"Least of all day dreams."

"Poor man; you miss much."

"I save myself **from** more."

There was an undercurrent in his tone and words that puzzled her, a look in his eyes that puzzled her more, a hint of electricity in the air that made her welcome any diversion, and she stopped Mr. Perkins and his sister as they ambled along the deck in conscientious quest of exercise.

"That's right, Mr. Perkins," she said with hearty encouragement in her tone. "You'll feel a lot better if you take a little exercise every day."

The thin, sharp-featured face whose scholarly refinement was overlaid with peevish discontent shrank further into the high turned-up coat collar.

"I don't know. I don't know. My heart has been acting very queerly since luncheon, and yet I ate very sparingly indeed — just a little soup and some curry and a slice of toast. I'm trying some new capsules. A New York friend recommended them. He had the prescription from a very famous physician and they cured him but they don't seem to be doing much for me yet. I suppose mine is a more complicated case. Maria, I think it must be time for my capsule."

Miss Perkins fumbled in her bag and produced a small box.

"I'll run and get the water, Martin. You'll stay with him until I get back, Miss Carewe? I don't feel that he ought to be left alone a minute when his heart is behaving so."

"Shall we walk?" suggested the Count.

"Oh, no, I couldn't keep up with you. This seasickness has upset me badly. I wouldn't be on my feet at all only Mrs. Bagby was so insistent. She really didn't give me any peace. She isn't a sympathetic person and yet I rather like her. There's something very genuine

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about her — and something reassuring. I seem to feel better when I'm with her."

"She's a dear," Belinda said warmly.

Mr. Perkins looked dubious.

"But not at all sympathetic. Sympathy is a very beautiful quality in a woman. A man expects it. I've always been accustomed to it in my family."

Miss Perkins arrived, out of breath, apologetic.

"I'm afraid I was a long time, Martin, but I hurried as fast as I could."

The capsule was solemnly swallowed. The sufferer resumed his creeping progress, the devoted spinster trailing by his side; and Belinda laughed helplessly.

"Isn't that a nice hypochondriacal proposition for a personal conductor to handle?"

There was despair in her voice but a glint of humour in her eyes.

The Count looked after the retreating pair.

"If the estimable sister would but beat him once an hour instead of giving him a capsule! That would do much for him — but I have an idea that the unsympathetic Madame Bagby will effect his cure. She is like an electric battery for him. She shocks him with charges of common sense; but when he recovers he goes back for more. I have watched them. They are amusing, those two, and you will have a love affair on your hands, Mademoiselle Carewe. What is it that you call

the warm weather in the autumn? Indian Summer? Yes, that is it. You will have an Indian Summer romance."

"Ridiculous," scoffed Belinda.

"You'll see, dear lady. He is like a human turtle with his head going into his coat collar and out of it as it does, but even a human turtle may be loved. He is probably quite unlike the lamented Monsieur Jonas. That is in his favour. And then these strong, sensible women — they like weak men, just as the invertebrate man creature loves a strong woman. What would you? It is a provision of nature."

"But — love!"

The intolerance of youth was in her tone. The man smiled.

"Oh, not the high fever. I grant you that. After fifty one is perhaps immune, save in exceptional cases. A compensation for age, Mademoiselle. At fifty one does not make such blunders as at twenty-five. One takes one's love placidly at fifty. I have still ten years to wait for security. One is still blundering at forty, I find. I await impatiently the end of the next decade."

"And it is always, you think, a 'blunder' — this high fever of love?"

"Or deliberate folly. That may be — even at forty."

He was looking down at her with a reckless smile on his lips.

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"Yes, even at forty one is capable of sheer folly. Never try twoscore years too far, Mademoiselle Carewe."

Belinda prayed for a second advent of the Human Turtle. These waves of sultriness were oppressive and experience had taught her that conversations with men about love were unprofitable. Even the nicest men seemed unable to talk rationally and impersonally on that one topic, and yet the subject — in the abstract — was such an interesting one.

"A dance to-night, Miss Carewe! The Captain says so. Isn't that jolly?"

Amelia's voice relieved the tension.

After all, there were advantages in personally conducting a party. One could never be left to one's own destruction for very long at a time.

"Lovely," agreed the chaperon with proper enthusiasm.

"All waltzes and two-steps. The Captain said I could arrange the programme. I could simply die waltzing or two-stepping."

"Don't," urged Miss Carewe.

"You might perhaps give me a dance, Miss Bowers. I have profound desire to be, as my English friends say, in at the death — a so pleasant death."

Amelia blushed; but Amelia was always blushing, so Belinda thought nothing of that engaging phenomenon. It was the glance the girl gave the man that caught the chaperon's eye. A glance that held an elusive something

difficult to name, something that suggested understanding, familiarity, something secretive, fleeting.

It was gone before it could be analyzed. The Count's smile was imperturbably serene, the smile one accords to an attractive child.

"A waltz?" asked Amelia.

"Or two or three," the man amended. "Be generous."

"Three then — the third and fifth and ninth."

Belinda brushed the cobwebs from her brain. Her imagination had been playing tricks. Amelia with a secret! Amelia and the Count! Nonsense!

She had slipped her arm through the girl's, but waited, while the glad news of the dance was handed on to a passing group of young folk, and the count took advantage of the pause.

"And you, Miss Carewe? Are you also generous? Give me all you can, but the last dance is ours. Yes? We shall be landing to-morrow. It will be something to carry with me, the memory of that last dance with you."

There was no excuse to plead and he would probably dance well. One could not imagine him dancing badly. She nodded, smiling, but she breathed more easily when she and Amelia had left him standing by the rail. He was not like the men she had known and she had a wholesome fear of unknown explosives.

CHAPTER FIVE

A TEMPORARY TRUCE AND THE SOLVING OF A RIDDLE

ON THE day of the dance, any one interested in Jack Courtney might have noticed a sudden change in the personally conducted young man. Every trace of the sulkiness which for days had clouded his customary cheerfulness was gone. He showed a shining morning face at the breakfast table and even the hot white blanket of fog which awaited him on deck could not dampen his buoyant mood.

Miss Carewe noticed with surprise and a certain annoyance that her cool politeness seemed ineffectual as opposed to the irrepressible good spirits of the Odious Creature. He tucked her into a chair as gaily as though he expected her to be grateful and chatted with her as briskly as though he were sure she would consider conversation with him a privilege. He petted his Aunt Florilla, jollied Mr. Perkins, chummed with Mrs. Bagby, patronized the two girls, was even pleasantly civil to Count de Bris-sac; but first, last and always he ignored the possibility of any icy barrier twixt himself and the young woman to whose party he belonged. In vain she tried to put

the presuming creature in his proper place. He smiled amiably and took the place he fancied.

Belinda, puzzled and a trifle dismayed, searched vainly for a clue to this right-about-face. Only Mrs. Bagby, looking on with a non-committal smile, understood and inwardly applauded.

"That's more like it," she said to herself with quiet satisfaction, and a touch of honest pride.

For it was Mrs. Bagby who had worked the transformation, although the thing was done with a casual air and no definite word of advice was spoken.

Late on the night before, Jack Courtney, smoking a last cigar on deck, had come upon Mrs. Bagby dozing in her chair and sat down beside her. For a while the two were silent. Then, some question about the itinerary of their tour started a desultory conversation.

"I told Miss Carewe she'd have to fix it so I could see Waterloo," Mrs. Bagby said, decisively. "I wouldn't miss that for a good deal. It always makes me feel that we can't be beat. Of course, I ain't English, but American's the next thing to it—same fighting blood I reckon—and if that fire-eating Frenchman had messed England up the way he did all the rest of Europe, I wouldn't feel half as satisfied with my family tree as I do."

"Good deal of a fluke, that victory." Courtney was in a cynical mood. The old lady shook her head and sat up straight in her chair.

"Don't you believe it, son. The English have made a collection of flukes of that kind. Winning's got to be a habit with them. They did give in to us once or twice but that was all in the family so it didn't count, and an Englishman or an American who'll let a Frenchman beat him at war or anything else is just going square back on his forbears. It ain't that I don't like the French. They've made a lot of grand history, but I've got it in my creed that if an American braces up and believes in himself he can sprinkle Waterloos all over the map. He can't do it by sitting in a corner and sulking, though."

Courtney's cigar had gone out. He relighted it carefully. In the flaring light of the match, his face looked very handsome, very boyish, and the old lady smiled, with a quick following sigh for the son the Fates had not given her.

"You put your money on the Anglo Saxon then?" the man asked with a quiet voice, through which a new note tingled.

She leaned forward and laid a hand on his arm. Her homely face was aglow.

"Boy, there's nobody like him. Sometimes he's foolish, sometimes he's bad — but he goes after what he wants and he gets it. He does it with a joke and a grin, and a steady nerve too. You don't catch him making theatricals of it."

Jack Courtney sat up suddenly, cast a hasty glance

along the deserted deck, and kissed Mrs. Bagby's wrinkled cheek.

"There!" he said gayly. "The first gun has been fired in a campaign of audacity. *En avant!*"

"They'll be talking scandal about us," laughed the old lady, but there was approval in the pat she bestowed upon the young man's coat sleeve. Her heart was big and she had little to fill it.

Remembering this interview, Mrs. Bagby read Courtney's new phase aright. His fighting blood was up. He was going after what he wanted and he confidently expected to get it. If the French nobility stood in the way, so much the worse for the French nobility.

The one representative of the French nobility directly concerned in the affair, recognized a new element in the situation. Courtney's genial, slightly patronizing air toward him was more objectionable than his earlier rudeness. It could not be resented and it gave him no opportunity for an exhibition of superior manners. Moreover since this pestilential young American had come out of his shell, opportunities for gracious civilities toward members of Miss Carewe's party were suddenly lacking. Mr. Courtney seemed to fill the stage, met every need, made himself indispensable; and did it all with a blithe self-assurance, an air of established intimacy which relegated the Count to the rôle of rank outsider.

He had become conversational, too, this surprising

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Monsieur Courtney who had not heretofore had a word to throw to a dog. It appeared that these Americans could talk of other things than money making, when they gave their mind to it, and this one talked amazingly well, in an inconsequent fashion, telling tales of ranch life in Arizona, of hunting with the outlaws of Jackson's Hole, of prospecting in Mexico, of cruising in South American seas.

Belinda, ostensibly buried in her novel, found herself forgetting to turn the pages, forgetting, too, that this was the objectionable person whom she detested and with whom she would not upon any terms establish friendly relations; but she reminded herself of the damning facts whenever a break in Courtney's narrative gave her a chance to think of other things, and she gave no outward sign of interest in anything beyond her book.

The fog drifted away before the increasing breeze, clinging in shreds to mast and cordage, hovering phantomwise over the crests of the waves, playing strange tricks with the struggling rays of sunshine. Count de Brissac, tired of a scene in which another man held the limelight, wandered away to the smoking room. Amelia and Laura May triumphantly carried Courtney, Mrs. Bagby and Mrs. Perkins off to play shuffleboard, Mr. Perkins feebly protesting, but finding a certain awful joy in his own hardihood. Miss Perkins had gone to her stateroom after breakfast.

Mrs. Nicholson, left alone with Belinda, turned a happy face toward the girl.

“Jack is quite himself again today,” she said with an air of relief. “Now you will see him at his best. Have you noticed the change, my dear? I’ve been worried about him, but he’s evidently all right now. He’s very entertaining, isn’t he?”

And out of consideration for the doting aunt, Belinda did violence to her prejudices and admitted that he was entertaining. To her own surprise she found herself distinctly piqued by the very obvious restoration of Courtney’s good spirits. That a man under the ban of her displeasure should unconcernedly radiate cheerfulness was disconcerting, if not downright insulting. It upset tradition and destroyed her confidence in well-established laws of cause and effect. Men were not expected to smile when she frowned, and this attack of smiles was so sudden. There had been gloom enough only twenty-four hours before. Perhaps, after all, that gloom had had nothing to do with her coolness. Perhaps there had been some other cause for it and that cause had been suddenly removed.

Belinda blushed.

It was mortifying to think that her efforts toward refrigeration might all have been unnoticed, utterly futile — and yet it would be still more mortifying to think that the man had appreciated the efforts and was not in the

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least affected by them. Curiosity seethed within her. Did he care? Didn't he care? Had he joined the party because she was conducting it or because his aunt belonged in it?

Even when all the questions were answered and however they were answered he would still be abominable. That was understood. But, in the meantime, she hated riddles. She wanted to know just where he stood, this intrusive person.

Sounds of hilarity floated back from the forward deck, where the game of shuffleboard was in progress, and after a vain effort to enjoy her book, Belinda left her chair and strolled forward.

"You should just watch Mr. Perkins, Miss Carewe," Amelia called out to her as she came within hailing distance. "He's a perfect wizard at shuffleboard. He's beating all of us."

Mr. Perkins, his overcoat thrown aside, his cuffs tucked up, his bald head shining, proceeded to demonstrate, and as his disc settled reposefully on a high number, mopped his brow and turned a triumphant face toward Miss Carewe.

"Just a trick, a mere trick," he protested modestly. "It seems to come quite naturally to me. I've never realized before that I had an aptitude for athletics. I've been too frail to go into that sort of thing but perhaps ——"

"Best thing in the world for your liver," Mrs. Bagby interrupted briskly. "There — it's your turn again. Knock Mr. Courtney out." He did it, and looked to the gallery for applause.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Belinda.

"Bully shot," said Courtney.

"Didn't I say he was a wiz?" chortled Amelia, but Miss Perkins, arriving upon the scene from her state-room, stared at her brother in amazement and dismay.

"Martin! What in the world? And without your coat! And all in perspiration! Think of your heart, brother. Do think of your heart! There's your capsule — but you'll need something more now. I don't know what to give you. You'd better go right to your stateroom and lie down. Maybe some aromatic spirits of ammonia would ——"

But Mr. Perkins interrupted her impatiently.

"I'm feeling very well, Maria, very well indeed. Mrs. Bagby assures me that profuse perspiration is an excellent thing for the system. I'll just skip that capsule, Maria. I'm disappointed in those capsules anyway. It's your shot, Mrs. Bagby."

Poor Miss Perkins, dazed and distressed, sank into a steamer chair, clasping the despised capsules to her breast.

"I don't wish to say anything harsh," she murmured tearfully to Belinda, "but that woman is leading Martin

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into folly, sheer folly. He seems perfectly bewitched and he's getting more reckless every day. He actually ate waffles for breakfast yesterday — waffles with syrup. She told him to digest them with his mind and not bother about his stomach. Did you ever hear of anything like that?"

"The waffles didn't hurt him, did they?" asked Belinda gravely.

"You can never tell. They didn't seem to, right at the time; but there's no knowing what he may be laying up for himself. She says heavy flannels are deadly! He's going to put on light-weight ones. I'm sure I don't know how it will all end but I'm afraid there will be serious results, my dear, very serious results."

Belinda valiantly suppressed a smile.

"I wouldn't worry," she said gently. "He seems to be feeling better than when we started, and the benefits of the trip will probably offset everything else — even waffles and light-weight flannels."

Miss Perkins sighed.

"I don't know. It's wonderful how even the most sensible man can be led astray by a woman."

The picture of Mrs. Bagby in the role of siren luring Mr. Perkins from the high seas of rectitude was too much for Belinda's risible muscles. The smile would out and she walked across to the rail so that she might turn it loose without offense. She stood there, idly watching

the game, but no one joined her. Mrs. Bagby, Mr. Perkins, Laura May and Tommy Shallcross were playing. Jack Courtney had dropped out and was quite obviously flirting with Amelia—to that young person's evident delight and his own apparent enjoyment.

The chaperon felt old and neglected. After all, one was getting on at twenty-five. Only five years more and one would be thirty; and after thirty—the deluge.

Courtney strolled over to Miss Carewe, when a group of girls interrupted his tête-à-tête with Amelia, and she watched his coming with mixed emotions among which curiosity was uppermost. He did not seem eager to join her—amiably indifferent rather—but he came; and when he reached her she welcomed him with a smile and an upward glance which, for the moment, reduced him to speechless amazement.

She was actually showing *him* her eyelashes—and her dimples! She was looking *at* him, not *through* him.

Her eyes were friendly and her voice, when she spoke, was as friendly as her eyes.

“Are you looking forward to the dance?” she asked. “The girls can hardly wait until evening.”

“And you?” he said quickly. “Of course you like dancing?”

“I adore it.”

“Me too. Will you give me the first dance?”

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She nodded, with another swift, encouraging glance from beneath the long lashes.

“And others?”

“Perhaps.”

“Every third dance?” He was growing bold.

“You are rash. I may dance badly.”

“You couldn’t. Every third?”

The shuffleboard game was ended. The crowd was bearing down upon them.

“Well then, perhaps *you* dance badly,” Belinda suggested. “Self-preservation is a natural impulse.”

He shook his head.

“I’ve been credibly informed that I dance like an archangel — if that conveys any idea to you. I gathered that the remark was intended for a compliment.”

“But every third dance with an archangel ——”

“Try it,” he urged. “You may like it. Perhaps the archangelic dancing is as good as their trumpet blowing and sword play.”

She laughed.

“I believe I’ll take my chances. The floor will probably be bad enough to temper the bliss so that a mere mortal can support it.”

They were not alone again that day, and Count de Brissac had his innings in the afternoon; Mr Courtney viewed his rival with a tolerant eye. Incidentally, he bribed the leader of the orchestra to rearrange his musical

programme making every third dance long and shortening the two in between.

“Ach ja; I also haf lofed,” said the sympathetic German, with a cyclonic sigh as he pocketed a bill whose back glowed yellow in the afternoon sunlight. “I will play for you waltzes to melt a heart of stone, Mr. Courtney. Not the two-steps. Du lieber Himmel, no. One romps through the two-step. It is for children who play, but for lovers the waltz also was made.”

“Well, the thing isn’t so serious as all that, Reichold,” Courtney protested with a laugh. “You can give me an occasional romp, but make most of those third dances waltzes.”

Then he rested on his oars and waited for evening; but, in the midst of his satisfaction, faint doubts assailed him. Why had she changed so suddenly! There must be some reason, but none appeared, and the Greeks bearing gifts had long been subject to suspicion. He puzzled over the thing a while, then tossed the problem aside. At least she had smiled — and they would have the waltzes.

The Captain’s dinner went off in festive fashion. The men who break into after-dinner speeches with or without provocation said their say. The orchestra played God Save the King and the Star Spangled Banner and every one stood up for everybody else’s national air, and when at last the crowd filed out from the dining salon, good fellowship radiated even from the most haughty and

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exclusive of the passengers, while those who were humanly sociable by nature went about sowing their visiting cards with reckless prodigality.

“Don’t you hate to think we’ll land to-morrow?”

Amelia addressed this question to the world at large, on her way out from dinner, but did not wait for an answer. Amelia seldom waited for answers.

“I do,” she went on with a rush. “I love every little screw in this old steamer. I’ve had a perfectly dandy time, and then there’s the dance to-night, and the moon’s full, and one doesn’t have to catch anything — trains and things I mean. Of course I know I’ll have a beautiful time in London. Laura May and I are crazy to see where Lady Jane Grey was beheaded and the Horse Guards and everything. They say they’re perfectly stunning and she was such a dear and it’s awfully sad, but you know it’s so nice just sailing along and not having anything happen, and seeing the same people, and eating five meals a day, and being perfectly sure nobody will come up and insist on your going somewhere because it’s instructive or your duty or something. I’d like to sail right around the world.”

The sentiment found an echo in Belinda’s heart. She was afraid of Plymouth. Responsibility waited for her there and the voyage had been a reprieve. Her mind wandered off on the trail of Miss Barnes’s instructions but was called back by something Courtney was saying.

"The fog has done its best for you, Miss Bowers. We lost two hours last night and more yesterday. We'll dock very late to-morrow if at all."

"Late in the evening?"

Belinda's voice held a note of dismay.

"Not before nine or ten."

"And about getting up to London?"

"They'll run a late train."

"But it will reach London in the middle of the night."

"Oh no; early morning. And they don't put you off at once. One can sleep until a respectable hour."

The wrinkle between Miss Carewe's brows faded away. She had had an appalling vision of a tired and disgruntled group of travellers wandering through unknown and deserted streets in the wee sma' hours, pinning their faith to bandit cabmen and waking irate boarding-house keepers from peaceful slumbers. By contrast with that picture a night in a sleeping car looked Elysian.

"Almost everybody's dressed up." Amelia was studying the crowd pouring out of the dining salon. "Even the fat woman with the babies has put on a white silk waist. She's the kind of woman that always does put on a white silk waist. You know, Miss Carewe. Sometimes they put a black bow in their hair, too. Miss Busch — the oldest one — that wrinkles her nose like a rabbit ——"

"Amelia!"

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The chaperon's voice was weighty with disapproval.

"Well, she does, Miss Carewe — just exactly like it. You'd have said so yourself if you had seen her eating lettuce. You know she leans back in her chair and cats everything with her knife."

"My dear, it's very ill-bred to criticize."

"Why, I'm not criticizing, Miss Carewe. I think it's wonderful how she does it — peas and everything. Laura May and I are wild to try. Aren't we Laura May? So's Tommy. He says he'd have given anything to sit at our table so he could watch her. He had his dinner there with us the other night — the night Laura May and I were so late, Miss Carewe. You had finished your dinner and gone. Well, Miss Busch ^dwas late too, and I had to keep telling Tommy all the time not to be rude and stare at her so. After a while he clutched at my arm and whispered 'look,' and of course I looked, and then I just couldn't take my eyes off her. She was sitting way back in her chair and she had a great big leaf of lettuce on her knife — all oily, you know, so it would make an awful mess if it fell off. She started it toward her mouth and it wobbled and wobbled and Tommy bet me a pair of gloves she couldn't make it. And then we couldn't see what in the world she was going to do with it if she did get it to her mouth — a great big leaf like that, flat on her knife. Well, when she got it up where she could reach it, she took the edge of it between her lips and then

she just began to nibble and nibble, sort of drawing the leaf in from each side. It was perfectly fascinating, and she looked more like a rabbit than ever, and by and by she got that whole leaf of lettuce in her mouth. Then she put down her knife and looked pleased with herself. Tommy said she ought to be. He said that wasn't bad table manners. It was a trick."

Courtney and Mrs. Bagby were chuckling, but Miss Carewe was making a laudable effort to look seriously displeased.

"That sort of thing sounds ill-natured, Amelia."

"But it isn't, Miss Carewe, really. I like her and I didn't mean to talk about her table manners anyway. I was just going to tell you that she said she'd been to Europe four times and that with two or three separate waists a lady could be appropriately dressed for any occasion. She almost made me sorry I'd brought evening gowns and afternoon gowns and things."

Courtney looked at the pretty pink frock the girl was wearing and smiled his approval.

"The rest of us are glad you brought them," he said with emphasis. "These women who pride themselves on getting along without any luggage and make frights of themselves when they travel, ought to be made to do their travelling where nobody else will have to meet them. The thing's a perfect mania with some women."

Amelia assented vigorously. "That's like Mrs. Powers.

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She's the stocky, determined looking woman you know, with the real short skirt and the brown fedora. She travels all the time. I don't know where Mr. Powers is. I guess he's dead, but maybe he's just tired out. She's on her way to Iceland now and she's just got a dress suit case — not another thing, not even an umbrella. Her suit is cravenetted and she has a rubber coat and she doesn't mind about her hat getting wet.

"She travelled all over Asia with only a dress suit case and she says that's ample, if you've got the things down to a science the way she has. You see she wears black silk underwear that don't have to be washed."

"Amelia, you talk altogether too much," interrupted the chaperon.

"Oh, she has two suits, Miss Carewe, so she can have them washed sometimes, but not often like white ones, and they take up much less room. And then, she has an extra skirt and an extra pair of shoes and another dark silk waist and two pairs of stockings and she's ready for Asia or anywhere. Oh, yes, and quinine and fever tablets and calomel and a toothbrush and comb. She just throws away her hat when it gives out and gets another. Once she had to wear a wicker basket. It's awfully clever of her, isn't it? She's been through two earthquakes and a riot and the cholera plague and the Suez canal and everything. I love to hear her talk. That's one of the nicest things about a ship. You meet such interesting

people that you'd never meet at home. You miss a lot, Miss Carewe, not getting better acquainted."

"There goes the band," interrupted Laura May, and the two girls fled deckward.

Belinda looked hopelessly at her companions.

"What can I do with her?" she asked.

"Let her alone," advised Courtney. "That type of girl often settles down into a first-rate wife and mother — one of the comfortable, affectionate, easy-going kind."

"But I feel responsible."

"Don't. A chaperon can't work miracles. She's rich enough not to need brains and she has good looks thrown in for full measure. She's an only child, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"And her father is worth twenty-five million and has heart disease! Brains would simply be wasted on that girl, Miss Carewe. Nature has to economize somewhere — and then I think she's rather a duck, just as she is."

The strains of a waltz floated in from the deck and there was a general exodus through the open doors.

Courtney looked a question at Belinda and she nodded assent.

"À vous, Monsieur l'Archange," she said laughingly, and they joined the outward-bound crowd.

The wide starboard deck had been cleared of chairs and made gay with festoons of coloured electric lights, which

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mocked the flooding moonlight, and the languorous melody of the Valse Bleu was mingling oddly with the surge of the waves.

Amelia and Laura May were already dancing, other couples were following their lead. Belinda slipped off the great cape of white serge which she had thrown over her white frock. Her eyes were glowing, she was already swaying slightly with the music. Even at twenty-five one has not left the waltz lure behind. Looking down at the eager face, at the slender swaying figure, Jack Courtney drew a long breath of thankfulness. It is something to have seen the face of one's heart's desire even if one must travel a weary way before attaining it.

"God bless that bull pup!" he murmured fervently, and Belinda catching the words faintly, looked bewildered. How should she know that if on a Maytime morning Dawson's bull pup had not called him across a short cut running through a certain orchard, Jack Courtney would not have been slipping an arm around her and gliding down the deck with her to the languorous rhythm of the Valse Bleu?

He could dance. There was no doubt about that. Overhead, the little red lights gleamed gayly, throwing splashes of colour over the morning crowd below. Beyond the rail a moonlit sea stirred restlessly, as though in answer to the music's urge.

The deck was rough, in spite of wax, the dancing crowd was motley, but Belinda forgot all that and gave herself up to the joy of moonlight and melody and rhythmic movement. She could understand why the enthusiast had called in the archangels in trying to describe Courtney's dancing. One could forgive much to a partner like this. Wrath, pique, curiosity melted away in the music's spell. Almost she could forgive the man for the encounter in the orchard, she might even forgive him for joining her party. If he wanted to see her again, wanted to be with her — how could she resent a thing like that, with the Valse Bleu sounding in her ears and the moonlight making a path of silver across the sea, and the man's step rhyming with her own?

The music stopped, the spell was broken, but the charity endured.

Herr Reichold had been as good as his word.

The fourth dance found Belinda and Courtney together once more and it came quickly.

Loyal Herr Reichold! The seventh dance was theirs, the tenth.

After the tenth, Belinda retreated into a corner with Mrs. Nicholson. Why spoil those waltzes by interpolating two-steps with men who could not dance?

Courtney was dancing with Amelia. It occurred to Belinda that he had been dancing with Amelia most of the time when he was not dancing with her and that he

seemed to enjoy it. The same idea had evidently occurred to Mrs. Nicholson; for she laid a hand gently on Belinda's arm and leaned forward to speak confidentially.

"They look well together, don't they?" she said with smiling pride. "Have you noticed how admirably they get on with each other, Miss Carewe? I shouldn't wonder at all if this trip would end very happily for both of them. Of course, being her chaperon, you wouldn't want anything definite to happen, but I don't think Mr. Bowers could object. Jack's family is excellent — and his social position — and he's doing very well in business. He has everything but money, and you see he needs money very much indeed — a great deal of it. There are some schemes just now. I suppose I mustn't talk about them, but one has to have money in order to make money now, it seems. We've felt that Jack must marry money. Not that he would marry *for* money, you know. He's not like that; but if he could fall in love with a very rich girl it would be most fortunate, and it's quite easy for a man of his age to fall in love with a rich girl, if he goes where rich girls are.

"I told him when I first decided to join your party that Miss Bowers was going and that I understood she was very pretty and a great heiress, and that I'd have her visit me after we came back, but he only laughed at me.

"I have wondered sometimes, though, if he wasn't more

interested than he seemed and if he wasn't curious to meet her, and hadn't made me a bit of a cat's paw."

She laughed softly.

"I shouldn't blame him at all. Young men will be young men and I know he's fond of me. And it would be very nice indeed if the thing should work out beautifully all around as it promises to. She's such a pretty girl and good hearted and she'll get over her heedlessness. It would really be a most suitable match, wouldn't it, Miss Carewe?"

"Perhaps."

Miss Carewe's reply was laconic, non-committal.

"Of course, I couldn't allow any entanglement while she's under my care," she added.

The word "entanglement" rang unpleasantly in Mrs. Nicholson's fastidious ears.

"You may be quite sure Jack will do nothing underhanded," she said rather stiffly, "but I don't see that any one can prevent their falling in love with each other, and from what I overheard between them this morning——" She stopped suddenly with a faint blush, and changed the subject. Things that men and maids say in jest nowadays would have meant much in the time of Mrs. Nicholson's youth, and she failed to make allowance for the latter-day freedom.

Belinda had turned her back to the light and was looking out across the water, her white cloak falling in soft

folds around her, its ample hood drawn up over her head and shadowing the sides of her face, though the moonlight fell white across her lips and eyes. The lips were not smiling and in the eyes there was a hint of scorn.

So that was the answer? He needed money and he had come heiress hunting. No wonder he was so well informed about Mr. Bowers's fortune and health and so tolerant of Amelia's manners. His aunt had told him about the girl and he had decided that so good an opportunity must not be lost. He would be the only young man in the party — would have every chance. He might very well feel confident. And he had been afraid she wouldn't be willing to personally conduct a young man, so he had kept his identity dark until it was too late for anything to interfere with his plans. Oh, it was all perfectly simple when one had the key. She had been sure devotion to his aunt did not bring him — but she had been fatuous enough to imagine that, having seen her in the orchard —

Tears of mortification rose to her eyes and glistened in the moonlight. What an idiot she had been! What a double-dyed idiot! He had wanted to make friends with her so that she wouldn't interfere with his making love to Amelia. And he had disliked Count de Brissac because he resented the Count's attentions to Amelia — afraid another fortune hunter might get in ahead of him.

The whole thing was clear, absolutely clear. Probably every one had understood — except herself — imbecile that she was.

The tears gathered and rolled down her cheeks. Belinda always cried when she was in a rage, and then went into a worse rage because she was crying. It was so stupid to cry, and it always made one's nose and eyelids red and swollen. Only book heroines could look like roses fresh washed with dew, after a good cry. Vanity came to her rescue, as it had many a time before, and she winked violently at the moonlight sea which winked back at her understandingly.

"Miss Carewe, this is our dance. It's next to the last number on the programme — worse luck!"

The shrouded, white figure started slightly at the sound of his voice but did not turn its head.

"I'm too tired to dance. You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Courtney."

She was civil, but her voice had regained the frost which had melted from it during the evening, and Courtney stared wonderingly at the hooded head. Her face he could not see.

"But I've counted so on this last one. Reichold's going to play the Valse Bleu again. You said you liked it, and ——"

"You'll really have to excuse me," said Belinda to the moon; and Courtney turned on his heel. What had he

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done now? What had happened? He had thought everything was going so well.

Ramming his hands into his pockets, he stalked off to the bow of the boat and stood there smoking savagely while the Valse Bleu sighed and pleaded and promised. Stubbornly he tried to shut the music out from his consciousness but it throbbed in his ears and tugged at his heart until it died away in a final, lingering appeal.

"Oh, hell!" exclaimed the man, as he threw his smouldering cigar into the sea.

Five minutes later, dancing the last dance with Amelia, he passed Miss Carewe and Count de Brissac. She was smiling radiantly and her dancing held no hint of fatigue.

"The Count's a gorgeous dancer," said Amelia.

Whereupon, Courtney repeated the terse remark which had relieved his feelings a few moments before but, this time, out of consideration for the Young Person, he muttered it under his breath.

The crowd on deck dwindled rapidly after the music stopped. All of the older folk promptly turned their faces berthward; and, though the younger contingent lingered, loth to leave the moonlight witchery behind, they too disappeared gradually with last regretful glances from sleepy eyes.

Belinda, strolling up and down the deck with the Brazilian mine owner, upon whom the beauty of the night was having an emotional effect wholly incompatible with

his limited command of English, passed a jolly group of whom Laura May appeared to be the central feature and suddenly woke to realization that the hour was late and that she was a chaperon.

She stopped beside Laura May's steamer chair and touched the girl lightly on the shoulder.

"Come, my dear. It's frightfully late."

A chorus of protests arose.

"The very last night, Miss Carewe — and such a heavenly night too!"

But the chaperon, having once remembered her rôle, was adamant.

"Where is Amelia?" she asked.

"The foolish thing went below half an hour ago. Said she was dead tired and sleepy."

Belinda felt a faint surprise. Amelia did not often fall by the way — Laura May reluctantly followed her chaperon down to her stateroom and parted from her at her door.

"It seems a sin to go to bed," she sighed. "But at any rate we won't land before late to-morrow evening and the moon comes up early. Good night, Miss Carewe."

She went on down the corridor to her own stateroom and Belinda, turning in to the cubby hole which she shared with Miss Perkins, began to make ready for bed, but found herself wondering about Amelia. It wasn't like the child to go to bed while any of her friends were

still making merry. Perhaps she was not feeling well. It would be wise to make sure she was all right.

Laura May opened the door when Miss Carewe rapped, and looked embarrassed when she saw the visitor.

"Is Amelia asleep?" asked the chaperon, stepping into the room, without invitation.

"She isn't here, Miss Carewe," Laura May stammered. "She must be up on deck somewhere. I've been thinking she'd come in any minute. She really *did* say she was going to bed, Miss Carewe."

Belinda did not wait to discuss the matter, but hurried back to her stateroom, threw a steamer coat on over her dressing gown and was on the top step of the companion-way when Amelia came in through the doorway, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining.

The flush deepened vividly, when she saw her chaperon, but she plunged into the breach without waiting for reproaches.

"Oh, Miss Carewe, I'm so sorry. I went up on the hurricane deck and I didn't know that it was so late and that everybody had gone below."

"Laura May told me you had gone down to bed."

"Well I did start, and then I got to talking and it was such a lovely night. I'm awfully sorry, Miss Carewe."

"You are very imprudent, Amelia. Don't let this sort of thing happen again."

Belinda was conscious that her reproof was inadequate

but a twinge of conscience told her that she herself had been careless, had not fulfilled the whole duty of a chaperon; and, too, her mind was distracted from the enormity of the offense by speculation as to Amelia's companion on the hurricane deck. Twenty-four hours earlier she would frankly have asked the girl who had been with her. Now, fearing the curiosity was personal rather than judicial, she was provoked with herself for caring to know.

And so, Amelia got off easily, but her chaperon's curiosity was satisfied after all; for, glancing back as she followed the girl down the steps, Belinda saw Jack Courtney come in out of the moonlight. She did not wait to see that Count de Brissac followed close upon Courtney's heels.

CHAPTER SIX

A BLUNDER AND A BREAKFAST

WHEN the steamer fulfilled prophecy by landing her passengers at ten o'clock in the evening, Belinda Carewe led her little flock along the dock with a masterful air of self-reliance and much inward perturbation.

"Talk about one's heart being in one's throat," she reflected miserably. "It's much worse to have it in one's stomach. That's where it always goes when one is scared, but I suppose the throat proposition sounds better."

"It's awfully spooky and queer, getting in so late at night, isn't it?" suggested Laura May. Miss Carewe smiled with an excellent imitation of cheerful unconcern.

"Why, I don't think so," she said serenely. "We wouldn't have time to see anything, anyway, and it would be a pity to waste good daylight on this performance."

And she counted the hand luggage which the stewards were piling in front of her, as though mathematics were a joy and responsibility mere balm for tired nerves.

Jack Courtney's bag was the last deposited on the heap and his hand instinctively sought his pocket, as the

steward turned toward him, but the competent young woman in the smart blue travelling frock was before him.

"That's quite right. Thank you," she said briskly, handing the man his fee.

"Here, porter!"

She departed with the porter, in search of the trunks; and Courtney, left with the group beside the hand luggage, grinned ruefully. He was being personally conducted.

The gospel of European touring according to Miss Barnes demanded that some one distinctive mark should be applied to all the luggage of the party, so that the trunks might be spotted quickly even among a host of other steamer trunks; and in accordance with this theory, labels upon which a yellow lion romped over a vivid red background had been sent to the travellers. The device had no subtle significance beyond indicating that Miss Barnes's cousin manufactured a lion brand of pickles.

Belinda called down blessings upon the head of her absent friend as she tracked the yellow beast through the alphabetical jungles of the English custom house. The B's, the C's, the L's, the N's, gave up their spoils; but with the P's came the disaster. Mr. Perkins's trunk was easily located, but only one lonely flamboyant lion enlivened the section devoted to the P's.

In vain willing porters pulled the pile of luggage about, in vain Belinda bestowed smiles and pleading upon various officials and even hinted at tears. They were moved,

those honest Englishmen, they were willing, they were even eager, but no trunk marked M. E. Perkins, Franklin, Ohio, and presided over by an ardent lion was to be found. One by one fellow passengers found their luggage, had it examined and departed. Little by little the crowd thinned out. Belinda finally went back to her waiting charges and questioned Miss Perkins. She had postponed acknowledgment of her difficulty as long as she could, but the time was passing and the London train would not wait.

Miss Perkins, much distressed, could only repeat: "M. E. Perkins, Franklin, Ohio, on one end, Miss Carewe, and a lion on the other end."

"Lucky for her, the trunk's in between," giggled Amelia.

"Could I be of service, Miss Carewe?" volunteered Courtney.

She thanked him politely and indicated that she would prefer his remaining where he was. Then she and her porter set forth once more upon their quest.

Courtney took out his watch and looked at it, eyed the fading ranks of fellow passengers, and wondered whether Miss Carewe had reserved sleeping compartments. He had not seen her make such a move, but perhaps she had attended to the matter in advance and he did not dare to question her or to suggest the advisability of securing her tickets. She was running the trip. He was only a passenger.

He did finally, however, stroll about among the luggage and at the end of the dock, among the W's his eye was caught by a steamer trunk standing on end behind a huge wicker hamper. He walked over to it and examined it but a large W stared him in the face and he was turning away when two porters appeared, tilted the hamper on end, and loaded it on a truck, knocking the steamer trunk over in the process. As it fell, Courtney caught a flash of red and yellow and promptly investigated. A lion label decorated one end of the trunk.

Perplexed and wondering, he hunted up Miss Carewe and Miss Perkins, and explained the odd coincidence, Belinda merely looked surprised. Miss Perkins fell over upon a hat trunk, overwhelmed by emotion.

"Oh it's mine. It *is* mine, Miss Carewe. I'm so sorry — I never thought — and I've made you so much trouble. You see I borrowed it from my cousin Mrs. Watson and I had a man tack a tag with my name on it, over the W, and of course it never occurred to me that the tag could have come off. Nobody would have thought of that."

Miss Carewe's lips shut tightly for a moment. She did not look at Courtney, but led the way toward the errant trunk. Probably she wrestled with herself in passage, for when she turned around her face showed no sign of irritation and she met Miss Perkins's reiterated excuses with unruffled amiability.

The trunks were examined, marked, handed over to the porter.

“Just a moment now,” Miss Carewe said encouragingly. “I’ll get the tickets and the train is waiting. We’ll be in bed and asleep in no time.”

A queer dubious expression hovered about Courtney’s eyes and mouth, but he said nothing and the young woman hurried away, found the ticket office and with bland assurance, explained that she wanted sleeping accommodations for six women and two men, on the London train.

“Nothing left,” the agent announced curtly.

“Oh!” There was absolute despair in the morosyllable. “Oh, please, I *must* have them. I have a party. I didn’t know—I supposed there were plenty of compartments.”

“Nothing at all left,” repeated the man, but having put on his glasses and looked at Belinda he omitted the curtness. There was even a hint of regret softening his official British manner.

“But some of my party are quite elderly. Isn’t there anything? There must be something one could do, if one would pay ——”

“Stay in town over night.”

“Oh, that would mix things up horribly. You’re sure there isn’t anything left?”

“Positive.”

She turned away looking as forlorn as she felt; and

Courtney, who had been watching the pantomime from afar, read it accurately and cursed the absurd situation that had prevented his attending to the tickets and avoiding the difficulty. Already he began to understand that to be personally conducted for three months might perhaps require more spiritual grace than his mundane soul could pay on demand.

With gloom on her face and panic in her heart, Belinda went in pursuit of her porter.

“Always see your luggage put on the train,” Miss Barnes had warned — but she hadn’t said a word about securing tickets as soon as one landed, and Belinda felt distinctly resentful. Margaret had made her come on this ridiculous trip. She ought to have fortified her against every possible emergency. She might have known the silly ship would land passengers in the middle of the night.

“All on, Miss.”

The porter was turning away from the luggage van. He looked good-natured and he was very big, and then he was a man. Men had been invented simply because an all-wise Providence foresaw that railway travel was bound to come and that there would have to be some one to deal firmly with it. Belinda had always fancied, in an indefinite way, that the creatures had been created for her diversion, but now she knew better. She poured forth her tale of woe to the large, amiable man, and he

listened, wagging his head sympathetically. A passing guard stopped to listen too, and touched his cap respectfully when the story ended.

"Beg pardon, Miss, you can't get sleeping accommodations? I think I can arrange for you. Some reservations haven't been called for and it's just about starting time. How many are there in your party?"

"Eight," said Belinda, restraining an inclination to fall upon his neck and weep for joy and gratitude.

"Eight? I can take care of you. You'll have to hurry."

Belinda ran to her waiting charges.

"It's all right," she said breathlessly. "Come on."

The guard thrust them into a carriage, the porters threw their hand luggage in after them, there was a ringing of bells, a final tumult and scurrying, and the train pulled out of the station.

"Just wait here until we are fairly started," the friendly guard had said. "Then I'll come back and place you."

They waited for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes. At last the guard appeared, but his face was no longer wreathed in benevolent smiles. A lively embarrassment rested upon it and the look with which he met Belinda's inquiring glance was deprecatory, humble.

"I'm afraid there has been a mistake," he said in apologetic tones. "Some of those people turned up after all. I can only give you two doubles and two singles."

Belinda made no remark. What was there to say? Her mind was fumbling helplessly with those two doubles and two singles.

"I don't mind sitting up," Mrs. Bagby announced promptly.

"We'd love to," chorussed the girls, valiantly struggling to repress their yawns. Mr. Perkins and his sister were asleep in their respective corners. Courtney eyed the hypochondriac thoughtfully.

"Of course I will not take one of the berths," he said with decision, "and Mr. Perkins would not be willing to allow any of your ladies to sit up all night ——"

Miss Carewe interrupted him brusquely.

"I will stay in the day coach of course," she said with a firmness which left no room for argument. "Mr. Perkins and his sister will take the two singles, the girls can have one of the doubles and Mrs. Bagby and Mrs. Nicholson the other. That's settled."

She turned to the guard.

"Can one go in to the other car now?" she asked.

"But the sleeping compartments are in this carriage, Miss. This is the smoking room, but you will not be disturbed. One does not smoke in the night. You and the young gentleman can be quite comfortable."

Belinda started in dismay. It had not occurred to her before that she and Courtney might have to sit up together.

"Isn't there an ordinary day coach?" she asked eagerly.

"No place vacant, Miss."

She shot a glance at Courtney. He was staring out into the night.

"But it's most unpleasant for you to sit up all night. You'll be ill." Mrs. Nicholson's voice was almost tearful.

Belinda rose, laughing. Since one was in for a disagreeable situation one might as well accept it philosophically.

"I can sleep like a top in an ordinary chair, and these high-backed seats will be positively luxurious. Wake the Perkins family, will you, Mrs. Bagby, and I'll see you all safely bestowed in your quarters."

Courtney was left alone in the smoking compartment and his solemn gravity made way for something twixt wrath and mirth.

It was an outrage that she should be let in for an uncomfortable night, but it was funny, by Jove, it really was funny. She had been snubbing him and avoiding him all day long. He hadn't been able to get a moment with her. Now the fates had taken matters into their own hands and the fates, it seemed, were farceurs — but he would need his steamer rug. The chances were that the atmosphere of the smoking compartment would be chilly — even Arctic.

And he was right. The drop in temperature arrived with Miss Carewe, but Courtney was becoming resigned to sudden changes. He even found the cold wave bracing.

"Rotten shame you have to put in the night this way," he said with friendly sympathy. "If the seat arms turned up as some do, things wouldn't be so bad. The seat would answer for a couch; but these arms don't budge."

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you."

Civility at a temperature of about five degrees above zero.

Courtney unstrapped a bundle of steamer rugs, threw one of the rugs across Belinda's knees and another across his own.

"No reason why we should freeze to death with all these warm things at hand."

There was profound thankfulness in his tone and Belinda looked at him suspiciously, but his smile was childlike and bland. Probably he didn't mean anything save a reference to the coolness of the English night, and even if he did — well, there was something in the young woman's nature which responded to audacity. A cringing man was hateful.

Courtney folded up the softest of the rugs and leaning toward her, deftly tucked it into the corner beside her.

"You'll find that better, I think. Didn't any of our crowd have cushions?"

"We left them on the steamer with some of the rugs, to be held for us at Cherbourg."

"Oh, yes. Too bad. We could use them now. I hope you will be able to sleep."

He pulled his cap down over his ears, turned up his coat collar and burrowed back into his corner. Evidently he did not intend to bother her with conversation. She was thankful for that.

The train sped on through the night and she watched a strange world of silver lights and black shadows racing past the window until, gradually, field and hamlet and forest melted into a dream of sailing in an enchanted boat, along a moonlight path across an inky sea. A yellow lion, in the bow, was grinding out the Valse Blue from an organ that looked oddly like a steamer trunk and everything was going very pleasantly indeed, until she happened to look around and saw that she was being pursued by a railway carriage flying the Jolly Roger and steered by a Pirate who was a cross between the Peter Pan article and a British ticket agent. She knew that there was no hope for her unless she could cash an Express Company check, and she gave herself up for lost, but just then the yellow lion wrapped a big rug around her and said, "Poor little girl." That was very comforting, though the Pirate was making a noise like a steam engine

and she fully realized that he wouldn't spare her unless she told him, at once, how many sixpences there were in a guinea.

She couldn't do that under any circumstances; so she counted the hand luggage and waited, and just as the boat was sinking and the lion was waltzing off over the water with the steamer trunk under his arm, she found herself staring drowsily out at high, dirty walls, curtained with sickly gray fog and punctuated by lighted windows.

The train was standing still in the station, porters were wandering about the platform, a few sleepy-looking travellers hurried here and there in the wan light of the waking day.

"Good morning."

For a moment she thought it was the Pirate, though the voice sounded like the voice that had said "Poor little girl." Perhaps it was the lion.

She struggled valiantly with a benumbing drowsiness; and, quite awake at last, turned from the window to her fellow passenger. He was smiling at her, friendly-wise; and, on the whole, she preferred him to either the lion or the Pirate, so her good morning was almost gracious.

"You slept?"

"Yes — and dreamed." She laughed a little at the remembrance of the wonderful dream.

"Bad dreams, I'm afraid. You cried out once as though you were frightened."

The voice was *very* much like the voice in the dream.

"Well, he was a very dreadful Pirate," she said plaintively.

"Poor little girl!"

Oh, there was no doubt about it. That was the voice, and it was very impertinent of him to pity her. She tried to feel offended and haughty, but in the clammy cheerlessness of the London dawn, it was very difficult to resent sympathy, even though the sympathy was impertinent; so she passed the remark over and snuggled down among the folds of her rug. Suddenly it occurred to her that no warm rug had been wrapped about her shoulders when she went to sleep. There had been one across her knees. It was still there; but this other. How could he have done it without waking her? He was very officious, this large, cheerful person — and presuming — but the rug was a comfort. She would pass it over with the impertinent sympathy.

"We're in London?" she asked.

"Yes; we got in some time ago."

"What time is it?"

"Five o'clock."

"I suppose I won't dare call the others before seven. They'll be wrecks all day if I do. Maybe I might make it half-past six."

"Think of Mr. Perkins's heart," Courtney advised gravely.

"I'm busy thinking of his disposition."

"Well, we will go out and get some breakfast now. There's no reason why we should wait, and there's a very jolly little place right across from the station."

Belinda dissented promptly. She did not want breakfast. Really one might imagine this man was conducting the party. The thing mustn't be allowed to go on.

"But a cup of coffee would be very encouraging," he urged.

"Go and have one, Mr. Courtney. I shall wait."

He subsided.

The time dragged on, leaden-footed, and Belinda gazed out of the window. There was something frightfully depressing about that station. She loathed the place. She was shivery and tired, and empty. Yes, she *was* empty. She had been too excited about landing to eat much dinner the night before.

Through one of the nearest lighted windows, she could see a man, sitting at a desk and eating his breakfast from a tray. She could almost smell the coffee. Or was it tea? Yes, probably it was tea, but it was hot. The cup steamed as he lifted it to his lips. A cup of something that steamed would make life endurable. And she might have had it. She would have suggested breakfast herself if the man had only waited; but, of course, she couldn't allow him to dictate, and now she couldn't fall in with his idea after having been so firm about

it at the start. If he had even asked her opinion — but he hadn't. He had simply stated that they would go to breakfast.

She shivered miserably. Why in the world should people want to travel in England! One was always uncomfortable there. Cold and dampness and poor beds and bad food! The toast was always cold. And, at the word, her heart went out toward that cold toast in a wave of longing. She could see it waiting in its rack, and there would be orange marmalade. Even eating a soft-boiled egg from the shell had no terrors for her. She yearned for the fray. As for the coffee —

“Miss Carewe, I do wish you would consent to having some breakfast. I would feel like a brute going off alone and leaving you here, and I'm mortally hungry.”

She made an effort to conceal her frantic joy.

“Oh, well, if I'm keeping you from your coffee.”

The tone was amiably indifferent, but she rose with suspicious alacrity. He might refuse to accept her sacrifice.

A sleepy old waiter woke to effusive civility and fatherly interest when he welcomed the young couple. Here was a tip, sure, generous, providential. He hovered about them, he consulted preferences, he offered deprecatory but expert advice, he deplored necessary delay. He made fervent promises. His comprehending smile was a benediction, a “bless you my children.”

Could madame fancy muffins — toasted muffins? She blushed under the madame but welcomed the muffins.

And a bit of kipper now? The kipper was very fine — or a bloater, with a rasher of bacon on the side. Kipper? Ah, very good, very good. And would madame have an egg? No? Perhaps the gentleman? No eggs? Very well, and coffee of course? Certainly. The Americans always preferred coffee.

Would the gentleman like to see the *Times*? Oh, of course not.

His tone apologized, admitted his stupidity in not understanding, at once, that the couple had not yet reached the paper-at-the-breakfast-table stage of matrimony. He deposited the coffee tray before Belinda with a benevolent air and smiled appreciatively when she asked Courtney how many lumps he would take. Whereupon, she put four lumps in the cup instead of two and blushed in a guilty fashion that made the ministering angel beam upon her more benevolently than ever and withdraw to a discreet distance.

But the kipper was good and the muffins were delectable, and the coffee put heart of grace into the fagged little woman. As for Courtney — he was radiant. The tête-à-tête breakfast made him dream dreams and see visions and the waiter's evident misconception roused no wrath in his soul.

Soaring optimism made him bold; and, as Belinda

finished her coffee and set the cup down with an air of finality, he leaned forward across the table and asked a question.

“Miss Carewe, have I done anything to offend you?”

She stiffened perceptibly. For the moment she had forgotten his heiress-hunting proclivities and accepted him as an agreeable companion, but now her resentment came back with a rush.

“Nothing whatever, Mr. Courtney,” she said coolly, crisply. “Will you pay the waiter? I will settle with you on the train.”

Courtney’s air castles tumbled with a crash, the rose colour faded out of his perspective. The remark he made inwardly was unfit for publication — but he pulled himself together, paid the smiling old man whose “Thank you sir. A pleasant journey, madame,” sounded like a paternal blessing, and led the way back to the train.

Seated once more in their compartment, while Courtney stood beside the open door, Miss Carewe took out her purse, also a neat note book and pencil.

“Our breakfasts were how much, Mr. Courtney?” she asked with her best businesslike air.

The young man scowled sulkily.

“I can’t see that it is necessary for you to know, Miss Carewe. You breakfasted at my invitation.”

She shook her head decisively.

“That won’t do at all, Mr. Courtney. We must keep

things on a business basis. I should have paid for the breakfasts of the party, in any event; and it doesn't make the slightest difference whether we all eat together or separately. Now, how much do I owe you for the two breakfasts?"

He maintained an eloquent silence.

There was a hint of wicked enjoyment behind the judicial calmness of Miss Carewe's expression.

"You will make things very difficult for me, if you force me to make exceptions," she insisted. "You must remember that you have already paid me for your regular meals, and this was one of the regular meals. You really must tell me what it cost."

"I'll be hanged if I will!"

The reply was in the nature of an explosion, and whirling about, the exasperated man stalked angrily away down the platform.

Belinda viewed his departing back with profound satisfaction.

"This personal conducting does afford its moments," she remarked complacently as she went to awaken her sleeping flock.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JACK COURTNEY INSISTS UPON SHOWING AMELIA THE FESTIVE SIDE OF LONDON

ONCE installed in London quarters, the Carewe party took up its systematic round of sightseeing and the days were crowded full.

Belinda began with the Abbey. The A's ought to come first, she reasoned, and then everybody was fairly sure to approve of the Abbey, and she was too tired after a night of fleeing from pirates to persuade seven people that they were enjoying what they didn't in the least want to do.

On the whole, the first venture was a success, though Mrs. Bagby stoutly maintained that she was disappointed and surprised.

"It's real interesting in spots," she admitted, "but it's the most cluttered up place I ever saw. The Bishop had better hire somebody to sweep the mess all out and make nice, clean, bright Sunday-school rooms of the whole place. That'd do the living some good. I don't hold with burying folks in churches anyway. Things weren't intended so. You can just put me out in the open

and give me a chance to grow up into flowers or grass or weeds."

"But, my dear Mrs. Bagby, think of the honour of a place here!" Mr. Perkins was aghast.

"Honour fiddlesticks! Look at Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots over there. They'd have been tickled if they'd known they were going to be piled in here, side by side, wouldn't they? I wouldn't trust them not to begin calling each other names when they rise at the last day and find themselves crowded in together. No, sir. I'll just take a plain stone or a broken column or something in God's out of doors. You can have Westminster Abbey!"

She was alone in her heresy. Mr. Perkins revelled in historic data. His sister absorbed the wisdom that flowed from his lips, Mrs. Nicholson fluttered excitedly from tomb to tomb and dropped a furtive tear in the poet's corner.

"Isn't it wonderful to think their songs won them places here!" she sighed. "I've always wanted to see the poet's corner."

"It's lovely," Amelia assented. "I'll feel so much better acquainted with them all than I did just from studying about them, Miss Carewe. It'll give me a sort of a thrill in literature class to think that I've stood by the tombs of so many of them. I think it's a splendid idea to have them all buried here in a bunch, so you

don't have to go hunting around everywhere to stand by their tombs."

Laura May nodded vigorously. "Kings and queens too," she added. "I never did realize they were real before. They just seemed like things in books; but if they hadn't been alive they couldn't have died and been buried here. I feel the way I did when I first went to New York. I'd be walking along, you know, and all of a sudden I'd come to the place where they made the kind of cold cream I'd always used, or Lydia Pinkham's pills or Peter Thompson suits or something. It seemed as if I'd just gone to visit people I'd known all my life, and it's kind of that way about the poets and queens."

"Travel is a wonderful educator," Belinda remarked gravely to Courtney. Her eyes were dancing and she felt the need of some one with a sense of humor. "You don't seem to be using your Baedeker and your emotions as much as you should."

"I'm a saturated solution, Miss Carewe," he responded promptly. "I've supped full of dates and biographies. My feeble intellect won't take up any more. It's barely capable of welcoming the luncheon hour."

"I'm starving," declared Amelia, losing all interest in buried poets. "Let's go to a chop house, Miss Carewe. They always go to a chop house and get grilled bones, in books. I'm crazy to see what a grilled bone is — but I want something with meat on it first."

They went forth in search of a chop house, without delay. In the course of the Barnes-Carewe tours Miss Barnes had formulated one theory which had proved invaluable.

"The thing to do is to feed them early and often," she had explained to Belinda. "No matter what they are doing when meal time comes or what they'll miss by leaving, take them away and feed them. And if they get cranky and difficult in between meals get them something to eat then — an ice or a sandwich or a cup of tea or something. It costs money, but it's amazing to see how it promotes amiability. If you can get them something queer and peculiar to the place where you are, so much the better. I've known Grassmere gingerbread to save a disastrous day and Dobistorte kept one of our parties from breaking up in a riot in Vienna. Feed them whenever there's the slightest murmur of fatigue or discontent, Belinda."

So Belinda turned her back on Westminster Abbey and went in search of English mutton chops which promoted a unanimous friendliness toward England in general and London in particular.

"Aren't we having a heavenly time?" bubbled Amelia rapturously, as the waiter took away her chop plate and presented her with the grilled bone for which her soul had yearned.

"I haven't an idea how to eat this thing, but I'm sure I'll like it. I've just loved everything so far."

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Fortified by luncheon, they did the Tower and St. Paul's and the Temple, and then recuperated from the triple strain by having tea at the Savoy.

"I don't think grilled bones stay by you very well," Amelia announced, as she gazed at the tea-drinking crowd and recklessly consumed small cakes. "I was getting perfectly wolfish. Maybe it's because sightseeing burns up your oxygen too fast or something and you have to keep putting in fuel. A man lectured about that sort of thing once in physics class, but he was talking about the effect hard studying had and I didn't bother to listen much. It didn't seem as if I needed to know what would happen if I studied too hard, because I didn't have the faintest idea of doing it. This needing tea so much made me think about the lecture. Sightseeing does tire you, doesn't it?"

"But it is getting tired in such a good cause, my dear." Mrs. Nicholson was weary but ecstatic. "It has been such a lovely day, Miss Carewe, I don't know what I've enjoyed the most — the Abbey I think; but there was something wonderfully impressive about those nine dark marble figures in full armour lying in the Temple Church. It seems queer to think the Knights Templar lodge is given over to lawyers. That's the funny thing about London. I don't see how the people can get used to living their little lives and carrying on their petty business right around among the great dead and in the historic spots."

"Well, you couldn't keep on being all worked up over a place if you were selling fish there every day, and there's no use in our trying to be historic yet, because we can't, so we may just as well go on living our own way and not bother about tombs and spots except when we're travelling on purpose." Amelia's tone expressed content with modern conditions.

"It's all awfully interesting," she went on, reflectively, as she took another éclair, "but I'm glad I'm not historic. It must have been horrid. If we were back in old times now, everybody'd be shouting, 'off with his head,' like the Queen in 'Alice,' or putting poison in everybody else's tea or stabbing the waiters or something. And now nobody's doing anything worse than flirting and it's so nice and comfy just to sit here eating chocolate éclairs and knowing that nothing dreadful is going to happen."

"Something dreadful *will* happen if you keep on eating éclairs, Amelia," the girl's chaperon commented as she called the waiter and paid the bill, Courtney's gorge rising the while, as it always did during the bill-paying process.

That unfortunate young man writhed many a time during the days that followed. He had entered hardily upon his adventure with no thought beyond the necessity of being near the lady of his heart; and, as a realization of the price he was to pay for that privilege was gradually borne in upon him, he admitted that the proximity

came high. To have divinity paying for his chops and tea and tram rides and admission tickets was the high note of discomfort, but there were minor inconveniences, mere earth claims that did violence to the flesh rather than the spirit. He was fastidious, this young New Yorker, with a cultivated taste for the luxuries of life. Of course when one happened to be on a ranch or in the woods or in any other place beyond reach of those luxuries, one got along without them and had a corking good time doing it; but to be in the world of extravagant living and not of it, was trying, and to have one's pockets full of money and no chance to spend it was irony of an exasperating sort.

Mrs. Forbes-Wattles's boarding house was far above the average, as London boarding houses go; but a London boarding house was a new experience for Courtney and even the landlady's hyphen could not reconcile him to her stewed rhubarb and gooseberry tarts; nor could the fact that the house was "within a stone's throw of the British Museum" (see circular) console him for an omnipresent odour and a ubiquitous flavour of boiled cauliflower. Memories of Claridge's and the club tantalized him and invited him, but he clung valiantly to his traveling companions.

After all, one should be willing to mortify the flesh in service of one's lady and a dinner of boarding-house herbs flavoured with cauliflower, with Belinda across the table,

was better than any variety of stalled ox in gilded loneliness. If she could only be kind instead of polite, Paradise itself would pale to sombre dreariness beside the rose-hued beatitude of an evening in the Forbes-Wattles drawing room.

But then, if she were kind, they wouldn't stay in that sepulchral drawing room. They would go out and spend the money that was burning holes in his pockets. There were so many places to which he would like to take her, so many things he would like to do for her; but she wouldn't go with him. He knew without rash experiment just how she would snuff out such a proposition as that.

It was Amelia who offered him a key to the situation.

"Everything is lovely except the evenings," she said discontentedly, one night, when she and Laura May, Miss Carewe and Courtney were sitting on the overgrown red plush chairs of the drawing room, after the older members of the party had said good night.

"I just hate the evenings. Everybody's tired and stupid and there's nothing to do but go to bed, and it seems perfectly silly to be going to bed when there must be such a lot of interesting things going on, out there."

She waved her hand vaguely toward the window.

Miss Carewe sighed a quick response before she remembered that she was a serious-minded person with tastes above frivolity. The evenings had always been exasperating on these tours of hers. It was ridiculous to have

been abroad five times and to have missed so much, but one needed a man for evening larks, a real man, young and worldly wise and extravagant. The Barnes-Carewe men had always been old and economical. One stayed at home and played cribbage with them.

Courtney caught the sigh, though it died violently in a virtuous remark about the value of beauty sleep; and that night, after he had gone to his room, he attacked the problem of giving a young woman a good time in spite of herself.

Miss Carewe wouldn't allow him to take her anywhere. There was no use in asking her, but surely she wouldn't be hard-hearted enough to prevent his taking Amelia and, of course, she wouldn't allow the girl to go unchaperoned.

A consuming desire to show the fair Amelia the festive side of London swelled in his heart. He would have to take Laura May too, but that would be all right. Four was a better number than three and the two girls would entertain each other when it was necessary for him to be civil to the chaperon. A fellow had to be civil to a chaperon.

But he must devote himself to Amelia. It must be thoroughly understood that she was the one he delighted to honour. Any suspicion of his real motives would queer the deal altogether with Miss Carewe. Funny how she held that orchard grudge against him. It must be that — and his joining her party. It *was* embarrassing for

her. He admitted that, but she needn't be such a red Indian about it.

The next morning he invited Amelia to go to the theatre and have supper at the Carlton afterward. She was to ask Laura May and her chaperon to join the party.

She asked them and they accepted. Laura May with effusion, Belinda after a demurrer overborne by Amelia's desperate entreaties.

"It would be cruel of you, Miss Carewe, positively cruel — when we are invited and we may never be in London again, and I haven't had a chance to wear my blue frock, and the old folks go to bed right after dinner anyway. You couldn't be unkind enough to say 'no.'"

And Belinda was not unkind enough. Perhaps she too felt a longing for the fleshpots and Philistia.

The Carewe table attracted considerable attention from the Forbes-Wattles diners that evening. The stout lady from Toledo, with the two plain daughters, confided to the Vermont school teacher who sat next her, that she considered it ridiculous for travellers to carry party dresses around with them and that, as for low necks — well, going to the theatre in low-neck dresses wouldn't be tolerated among the best people in Toledo.

But the two radiantly pretty girls in their dainty Dutch neck frocks and the still prettier chaperon, with her more sophisticated evening garb, were scarcely calculated to scandalize the London elect; and Courtney, looking the

trio over with a proprietary pride, felt that pleasant glow which warms the man who realizes that his women folk are a credit to him.

"Heaven help all susceptible Englishmen to-night," he said, as Mrs. Nicholson, Mrs. Bagby and Miss Perkins excitedly tucked the girls into their coats, while Mr. Perkins looked on with something approaching enthusiasm.

"I feel that I am flaunting the stars and stripes in the face of the British public."

He waved the flag sturdily. Even Belinda was forced to admit that he did things well.

There was a box at the Lyceum which became so tremendously decorative after Courtney's party took possession of it, that it divided attention with the stage, and an obsequious head waiter led them to a reserved table at the Carlton with an *empressement* which argued remembrance of past munificence and a lively sense of benefits to come. That the remembrance circled round many a gay supper and dinner and that this imposing head waiter was an old and tried friend of Courtney's Belinda did not know, but she liked the atmosphere of solicitude and homage, and Amelia confided to Laura May privately that she would never, never marry a man who wasn't the kind a head waiter would run to meet.

"It's just a certain kind of a look that does it," she

explained. "Sort of an always-have-had-it, expect-to-get-it, don't-care-what-I-have-to-pay-for-it look. Mr. Courtney has it."

"Count de Brissac had it too," suggested Laura May. A swift red tinged Amelia's cheeks.

"It's a shame he had to go on to Paris. Wouldn't it have been fun if he had been coming to London," Laura May added; but Amelia was apparently absorbed in watching the crowd that was filling the tables.

"It's different as can be," she announced, after a prolonged survey.

"Different from what?" Courtney asked.

"From New York. The women aren't as well dressed as they would be in New York; but, some way or other, you feel as if they didn't have to be, and as if they knew they didn't have to be. I just wish you'd look at that purple brocade, Miss Carewe. Now if a woman had to go to Sherry's dressed like that, she'd be mortified to death and squirmy and uncomfortable, and everybody would be looking at her and criticizing her; but that purple brocade woman is perfectly satisfied with herself and everybody else is satisfied with her. She'd wrap a plush portière around her and drape a lace curtain over it and feel that she was giving the public a treat."

"That's the Duchess of P ——," volunteered Courtney.

“Really? Well, she looks it. Now, you know, that’s just it. I don’t believe one of the Sherry crowd could get into a dress like that and fringe her hair and curl it with a slate pencil and look like a Duchess. Isn’t it wonderful how anybody can? I suppose you have to be born that way — not with the purple brocade and fringe, but sure that whatever you do is all right. At home our women are so busy being dressed up that you can see the wheels go round, but these English women don’t seem to care much what they wear so long as it is cut down too low in the neck.”

“But some of them are lovely, and beautifully gowned,” Belinda objected.

“Why, I think they’re all lovely, especially the frumpy ones — but it takes a title and lots of strength of character to be lovely that way. I’d rather have my clothes fit than look like a Duchess — I think I would. Maybe after I get old it would be nice and comfortable to be Duchessy. Mother has a perfectly dreadful time trying to change her shape every season so she can wear the new styles and satisfy her dressmaker. Madame Smith says she simply can’t risk her reputation by making clothes for a last year’s figure.

“There’s a beautiful Englishwoman — that white-haired one in gray, with the old gentleman and the nice-looking young man. Why! They’re bowing to us!”

Amelia looked across the table in amazement and saw

Courtney acknowledging the greeting, his face crimson, lively apprehension in his eyes.

"Oh, it's somebody you know, Mr. Courtney?"

"Yes, I've met them."

The young man of the other party rose and came toward Courtney's table, cordial welcome on his jolly face. The American went forward to meet him, with outstretched hand.

"Why, Courtney, old man!"

"Well, Banty. Glad to see you."

"Don't say I've spent much time over here," Courtney added in low but urgent tones. Then he turned to his guests and introduced Lord Bantholme, who, slightly bewildered, but rallying nobly, made various polite remarks and went back to his elderly friends.

"I knew I'd like Lords."

Laura May's voice was eager, her black eyes sparkling.

"He's perfectly dear. Tell us about him, Mr. Courtney."

"Well, he's the Earl of Bantholme."

"Earl? I thought you said Lord?"

"You can't call a fellow 'Earl' to his face."

"Oh, I see. I always thought Earls were better than just plain Lords."

"Bantholme came into his title two years ago, when his father died. His mother died when he was a little chap."

"How perfectly lovely!"

Seeing the shocked expression with which even Amelia greeted her comment, Laura May hastened to explain.

"Not for him, of course. It's awfully sad for him, but I do think orphans are splendid. I always thought I'd marry an orphan. Mothers and fathers are so snippy sometimes. I should think an Earl's father and mother might be awful."

"He hasn't any belt," Amelia interrupted.

Courtney looked puzzled, but Belinda laughed. She was used to following the blind alleys of Amelia's reasoning.

"You always hear about 'belted earls,'" the girl insisted. "I thought they wore them."

"Banty keeps his for his tennis flannels."

Courtney was laughing now.

"Well, I shouldn't think you'd call an earl 'Banty.' You must know him pretty well."

"Oh yes — that is, everybody calls him Banty. He's very easy to get acquainted with — an awfully good sort."

Then, in his turn, Courtney beheld the other members of his party recognizing some one, Belinda with a smile, Amelia with a blush, Laura May with frank amazement. He turned to find out who had excited the commotion and saw Count de Brissac, suave, handsome, self-assured, making his way across the room with a brilliantly beautiful woman of a type distinctly French.

Laura May was the first to speak.

"Why, isn't it nice to see him again! He certainly is stunning. And isn't that a siren with him? Talk about clothes; and just look at that necklace, Amelia."

Amelia was looking.

"She's pretty old," she said critically.

"But a beauty." Belinda was generous and, too, her views on the subject of age were not those of seventeen.

The Count and his companion took possession of a table by a window and conferred with the waiter. The conference ended, Count de Brissac leaned back and looked about him. As his glance reached Courtney's table, a sudden glow flashed into his face. With a hasty word to his companion he left her and, a moment later, he was bowing over Belinda's hand in his impressive foreign way and passing on the greeting to the two girls.

"But this is most fortunate," he said, as he shook hands with Courtney.

"Picture to yourself that I arrive in London only an hour ago, I find my cousin, Madame de Lorgeville, we come here for supper, and the first persons I see are those whom I most wished to see. I was not sure you were still in London. You like it, this great London?"

"We're crazy about it." Laura May's gaze wandered to the back of Lord Bantholme's head. "I'd like to stay right here. I don't care much about travelling."

"Yes. One amuses oneself well in London — but not as in Paris. Wait until you see Paris. You will

allow that I introduce you to that dear Paris, I hope. And it is permitted that I call on you here? Perhaps to-morrow, at five? You will present my regards to the other ladies and to the joyous Monsieur Perkins?

“Au revoir, then, Mesdemoiselles. Au revoir, Monsieur Courtney.”

Courtney bowed stiffly. Belinda and the girls smiled graciously. From the table by the window, Madame de Lorgeville had been studying her cousin's acquaintances and upon his return to her she obviously met him with a rapid fire of questions to which he gave nonchalant replies.

“She seems awfully interested in us,” commented Laura May. “You can see she's asking him all sorts of things about us. Weren't you surprised to see him?”

Miss Carewe and Amelia admitted that they were surprised; but it occurred to Courtney that the surprise, save in Laura May's case, was not of an overwhelming character. Also he had noticed that the Count had not found it necessary to ask where they were staying.

Later on, as Courtney waited for his carriage, Lord Bantholme stumbled upon him and ran a detaining finger through his buttonhole.

“I say, old man, I don't know what the game is, but let me in, that's a good chap. They're the original Three Graces. They've got the Beautiful Gunnings beaten to a standstill. Take me around. Do. The slim one with the black eyes has me simply groggy in the knees.

Don't tell me she's your loadstar. Come now, Courtney. I'll swear you never set foot on British soil before. I'll tell them I had to swim out in order to get acquainted with you."

Courtney eyed him doubtfully.

"It's rather a rum situation, Banty. I don't know. Drop in at the club after one and I'll tell you about it."

"And you'll enter me for the black-eye stakes?"

"There's a chaperon."

"Where?"

"The one in pink."

"Oh, my suffering Aunt Jemina! A chaperon! That?"

"Wait until she disapproves of you."

"She won't. They never do. Since the poor old Governor went, I've had to wear spikes to fend them off."

"This will be very different."

"No it won't. I'm a dabster at chaperons. See you later."

He started away, but turned back.

"Saw you talking with that De Brissac fellow. The chaperon might work off her sharp edge on him. She'd better."

"Know him?"

"Know about him. Blooming rotter, my boy. Black sheep. Good family. He was mixed up in that nasty Hauteville scandal and a lot of others. Great pal with the De Lorgeville woman. She was with him to-night.

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She has handsome houses here and in Paris. Knows a few good people too. A bit off colour though. The houses aren't healthy for gilded lads with fat bank accounts. Play's too high. You know the sort of thing. Tearing beauty, though, isn't she?"

"He calls her his cousin."

Lord Bantholme grinned.

"He does? Well, they do say — but I'm gossiping like an old hen. There's your carriage."

Courtney was thoughtful on the way home. It was plainly his duty to warn Miss Carewe against the Count, but he had a suspicion, amounting to certainty, that she would not consider the warning disinterested. Perhaps, after all, there would be nothing more to bother about than the one call. They would be leaving London very soon. The days were full and he could keep the evenings full. Banty would help him. And before the Paris situation would have to be handled perhaps his *belle dame sans merci* would be more willing to listen to advice from him. For the present, he would let things slide.

As the two girls made ready for bed that night, Laura May chattered volubly.

"I can hardly wait to write home to the girls. Bess will be furious. She didn't meet a soul except Americans when she was over here last summer, and look at us! Of course, Mr. Courtney's American, but he's lovely and he knows exactly how to do things, and we've only been in

Europe four days and counts and earls are just cluttering up our doorstep. Isn't it the greatest fun?"

But Amelia braided her hair thoughtfully and, for once, was mute.

"It's those shrimps. You'd better take a pepsin tablet," advised Laura May as she climbed into bed. Amelia only sighed.

Meanwhile down at Brooks, Lord Bantholme was listening to Courtney and punctuating the tale with outbursts of hilarity that made the few other smokers look at him disapprovingly.

"Oh, my eye! What a silly ass you must feel, old man," he said as the two friends parted in the early morning hours. "But it's worth it. She's a queen. There's no denying that — only I like them black-eyed myself."

CHAPTER EIGHT

A LIVE EARL AT THE WHEEL

ON THE morning after the Carlton supper Courtney, for the moment alone with the girls and their chaperon, proposed a plan for the evening.

"Bantholme is eager to meet you all again," he said, "and I thought if you were willing, Miss Carewe, we might dine at Claridge's and ask him to join us. Then we could go on somewhere afterward."

Miss Carewe promptly vetoed the plan.

"I can't leave the rest of the party alone for dinner."

"But we'll take them with us."

"They won't go."

"Oh, yes, they will, if I promise to send them home to bed right after dinner."

Here, to every one's surprise and to Laura May's despair, Amelia seconded the chaperon's objections.

"I don't believe I'd better go again to-night, Miss Carewe. I don't feel so awfully well."

"Not really ill?" Belinda's tone was anxious.

"Oh no; just a little tired."

"Those shrimps!" Laura May was divided twixt

sympathy and exasperation, but the exasperation was soothed by Courtney's next remark.

"Well, would you mind Bantholme's calling this evening? He wants us to go down to Ranelagh with him to-morrow afternoon — the whole party, Miss Carewe. He has two big cars and I think Aunt Florilla and the rest would enjoy seeing Ranelagh."

"Splendid!" Laura May bounced on her chair like a rubber ball, but Amelia's expression was still doubtful and the chaperon became seriously alarmed.

"You're sure you don't feel very badly, Amelia? Does your head ache?"

"A little. I'll stay in and rest to-day, though. Maybe I'll be all right to-morrow."

"You'd like the Ranelagh plan?" Courtney's voice was properly solicitous.

"Oh, yes; it would be lovely, if I feel well enough."

"Well, you've got to."

Laura May was firm.

"You must simply starve yourself to-day, and take all sorts of things. I've got the cunningest little medicine case I've been dying to use. It has twelve different kinds of medicine in it — all homeopathic so they can't hurt you. Come on upstairs. I'll give them to you."

"I'll do the prescribing, if you please."

Belinda was laughing but worried.

"Would you like to have me stay with you to-day, dear?"

"Oh, no, indeed. I'm not so sick as that. I just want to be quiet."

Amelia wanting to be quiet was an anomaly distinctly alarming, and the chaperon's look of anxiety deepened.

"We will have to wait before deciding about to-morrow afternoon, Mr. Courtney, but if Lord Bantholme cares to call this evening ——"

"*Do bring him,*" Laura May begged. Her black eyes were eloquent and Courtney answered them.

"Short of sandbagging him, I couldn't keep him away."

So Amelia was left at home upon a couch while the rest of the party went forth, as Mrs. Bagby put it, "to clean up some odds and ends of sightseeing."

"We're getting along splendid," the old lady announced, settling her spectacles firmly and consulting her Baedeker, after the party was located on top of a motor bus.

"I don't see but what two or three more days will fix London up first rate. We haven't done Windsor and I'm bent on seeing the Zoo and the People's Palace, and Mr. Perkins says he's got to have a whole day in the British Museum. Of course there are things we'll have to skip, but my soul, this Baedeker man don't have any idea about time. He'd keep you busy in one place all summer."

"We only allowed a week for London, you know," Belinda reminded her.

"Yes, I know. That's only two days more. We'll have to do the Zoo and the Museum to-morrow."

"We have an invitation to motor down to Ranelagh for tea to-morrow."

"What's Ranelagh?"

"A country club — only it isn't really in the country."

"Anything to see?"

"Well, just the place. Queen Bess and her court used to go out there and the Kit Kat Club, and there's always polo and the crowd is amusing — a fashionable crowd, you know."

"My dear, I prefer the Zoo. The feathers are just as fine and the creatures are most interesting. You and the girls run along to Ranelagh. The Perkinses can cavort around among the mummies and heathen idols, and I'll visit with the animals. I like a live coyote better than a dead Egyptian any day and I'm tired of places where people were buried or beheaded. I'm sort of hankering after something cheerful."

"Well, Ranelagh's cheerful."

"Not nigh so cheerful as a camel or a pelican. Maybe the camels and pelicans ain't exactly cheerful themselves, but they make me cheerful. They're so plumb foolish and silly they tickle me 'most to death. I know people just like them. That's one nice thing about a zoo. The

animals all look like people you've known and that makes you feel at home right away. I spent days up at the Bronx Zoo before I came away and it was 'most as good as being back in Thompsonville. What'll you do to-morrow afternoon, Mis' Nicholson?"

"She's coming with us." Belinda was positive, but the little lady hesitated.

"You'll all be young, my dear."

"All the more reason why we need you. I'll chaperon the girls and you chaperon me."

"You're so young and pretty that you do need it. I think I'd like to go. I love pretty clothes and the house must be very old, and I'd like to see what china they use. I'm a little bit tired of dead people myself. There seem to be so many of them in London."

When the sightseers went back to the boarding house, a little before five, making the day a short one in view of Count de Brissac's promised visit, they found that gentleman already installed in the drawing room and being entertained by Amelia — a radiant Amelia, all in light blue and showing no trace of the morning's indisposition.

"In my eagerness I have arrived before the hour," the Count explained in smiling apology.

"Fortunately Miss Bowers was here to make it possible that I should wait patiently."

Belinda looked Amelia over with anxious eyes.

"You are feeling better, dear?"

"Perfectly fine, Miss Carewe. I'll be all right for Ranelagh. I knew all I needed was a rest. My head was simply woozy with sightseeing."

"Mine too," groaned Laura May. "I can't remember a blessed thing any more. I don't know whether William the Conqueror's a king or a painter or the cook at the Savoy. I feel like that tall lady from Burlington, Iowa — the one that's travelling with a woman's club. It's a History Club and they thought it would be lovely to have the woman that lectures to them — sort of a club leader you know — bring them abroad. So they came and now they hate her. She's just killing them. They've only been here since the tenth of June and they're completely frazzled out already. Last night, the tall one came up to the little fat one and said; 'Susan, have we been to York?' Susan didn't even try to think. She just looked tired and said, 'I don't know. You've got it all down in your book, haven't you?' The tall one said she had, and Susan said it was silly to bother about it. They'd have plenty of time to look it up and find out whether they'd been there when they got back to Burlington. I'm glad you aren't so very instructive, Miss Carewe."

"I don't know whether that is a compliment or slander." laughed Belinda.

"Well, you're giving us a scrumptious time and if we want to be instructed, we've all got Baedekers."

Count de Brissac, cordially invited by every one save

Courtney, stayed for dinner. He spent the evening, too, and placidly overlooked the British reserve with which Lord Bantholme recognized an introduction to him.

That astute young man, proceeding according to a tried and proved system, heroically devoted himself to softening the heart of the chapèron and succeeded amazingly. No normal woman could have disapproved of him. He was so jolly, so wholesome, so unaffected, so boyish. Even the elderly folk stayed up until after their usual bed-time to laugh at him and with him, and Mrs. Bagby admitted that she half regretted turning down Ranelagh in favour of the Zoo.

"I wouldn't pass you over for anything less amusing than a camel, son," she said dryly, as she bade him good night.

He wrung her hand in effusive gratitude.

"We'll go by camel instead of motor, if you say the word," he promised; but she refused the tempting offer.

"That's a corking old lady," Lord Bantholme said enthusiastically as the door closed behind her. "Your aunt's another, Courtney. I'm simply wax in the hands of nice old ladies. I adore them. I'd rather drink tea with them than champagne with any one else. They are so ripe and mellow, and they know such a lot of things without being told, and a fellow isn't afraid of their not understanding. The only reason I'm single at the advanced age of twenty-four is that no one over sixty-five

has ever been willing to marry me. Heaven knows I've asked them all. They always laugh at me, and try to marry me to their granddaughters.

"If I were a writing sharp, I'd write a book about 'Old Ladies I Have Proposed To.' They range from Dowager Duchesses to cooks. There's an old cook at my cousin's in Edinburgh for whom I'd shed my heart's blood, but she's always urging me to go and marry some wee bit lassie. It's not that she canna' thole me, but she compares me with Prince Charlie and I don't size up well."

"Poor lad!" Belinda looked volumes of sympathy.

"Now you know you're not old enough to take that tone with me, Miss Carewe — but I fancy you'll make a rippin' old lady. You haven't made any sort of a start at all in years, but you're going strong on the charm. I may lower the age limit by some forty odd years."

He was too blithely audacious to be snubbed and Belinda's heart warmed to him. If this eligible young Britisher should take a fancy to one of the girls —

The thought came back to her later as she watched him talking to Laura May, and she mentally reviewed the whole duty of a chaperon. The Lees would be delighted — but Laura May had little money for the gilding of titles. Now, if he would only fall in love with Amelia. Her eyes turned to Amelia and Courtney. No such luck! Amelia with her pretty face and sentimental

heart and empty head and great fortune was sure to make a mess of things, to be snapped up by a cold-blooded fortune hunter.

Belinda turned with a little sigh to the Count, who sat beside her.

"*Enfin?*" he queried.

"Money has its disadvantages," she said, offering him her thought, without the context.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"One makes shift to endure its possession with much philosophy. I must be going, Miss Carewe. You leave London in two days?"

"Yes."

"And you come back here?"

"In two weeks; but only for a day. Then we will go to Holland."

"And if one should cross your path during your travels?"

She hesitated. There was humble entreaty in his voice and his eyes were saying more than his words. The girls with their admirers made her feel old and she hated to feel old. She was only twenty-five after all.

"One is always glad to meet friends," she said softly.

"And you have no time for me before you go?"

"I'm afraid not. My time is not my own, you know — and there are evening engagements."

"But I shall see you again. Perhaps I, too, will drink my tea at Ranelagh, to-morrow. Good night."

He went to take his leave of the others and left her wondering why, saying so little, he always seemed to have said so much.

London weather was in holiday mood for the Ranelagh expedition and Lord Bantholme was in tune with the weather.

A more beamish boy than the one who brought a big touring car to a standstill before Mrs. Forbes-Wattles's door at three o'clock and ran lightly up the steps, it would have been hard to imagine, and the spirits of the waiting group, already high, soared at the very sight of him.

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!" Belinda chanted gaily. "I want it understood here and now that I haven't an ounce of responsibility on my shoulders. Mrs. Nicholson is chaperoning this crowd and the aforementioned blithe spirit is conducting it. Personally I've embarked on a career of utter foolishness. I've weeks of sobriety to atone for."

"That being the case, you'll sit on the front seat beside me so that I can keep a fatherly eye on you. I only brought the one big car, Courtney. There's room for all of us and it's jollier being together. My man will follow with the roadster. You can spill him out and take it any time if you choose to."

He tucked Mrs. Nicholson, Belinda and Amelia into their places and went back to wait for Laura May who, at the last minute, had gone upstairs for a

handkerchief. When she came, he lingered for an instant in the shadowy hall.

"It's all on your account you know — this tea party," he said. "Rough on me that I can't have you on the front seat, but I want Miss Carewe to like me. She's a brick and then she does the chaperoning stunts herself as a rule. If I could persuade her that she wouldn't mind my joining you somewhere up north, while you are there, would you hate it?"

The girl did not answer, but in some occult way he gathered that she would not hate it, and he followed her down the steps looking fatuously contented with life.

The car hiccupped, sneezed, groaned, palpitated, and sped away through the sunlit streets, leaving a trail of gasoline and laughter behind it. Even Mrs. Nicholson, after a few nervous moments, gave herself up to the exhilaration of the swift movement and the infectious gaiety of the daring driver.

"If I only didn't feel I had to scrooge my feet up to help us get by things, I'd like it very much indeed," she confessed. "And if I could only remember that all the other people know that we'll turn to the left. It seems so wonderfully intelligent of them to dodge us. Is that Hyde Park? Why don't we go through?"

"Too late," Lord Bantholme said, looking back over his shoulder while his machine chased an organ grinder up on the curb.

"The Queen doesn't fancy meeting cars when she wants to drive, so we're barred during driving hours."

"Why the silly old thing!" Amelia exclaimed irreverently. "I thought I'd like her. She looks so sensible and sweet in her pictures, but you never can tell from pictures. I'd just as soon go round the park, anyway. Who cares!"

Nobody cared. It would have taken more than royal caprice to mar the content of that party, escaped from the thralldom of Baedeker, raised above the sordidness of trams and busses, spinning down to Ranelagh in a luxurious six-cylinder car, with a live earl at the wheel.

"There's Kensington Gardens, isn't it?" asked Belinda as she caught a gleam of winding water. "I went over there late one afternoon. It was dreadfully disappointing — no Peter Pan, no children, just 'Arrys and 'Arriets and chronic park loafers. That's the worst of a man like Barrie. He is always giving nature impossibly adorable things to live up to."

"Nature's doing very well, thank you," Lord Bantholme protested. "Look at the old lady! Isn't she laying herself out for us to-day? And yet there are ridiculous persons — mostly Americans — who have a theory that England is a fogbound isle and that we don't know what sunshine is. I rely on you to uproot that folly when you go home, Miss Carewe. How's this for

June sunshine? Solid chunks of it! Talk about your blue Italian skies! We've got them looking like a gray flannel shirt."

"But you do have fogs!"

"We do. God bless 'em. I got caught in one with a girl last winter. We lost her mother at the first jump and couldn't find our way home from church. I considered it a reward of virtue—for going to church, you know. It almost gave me the church habit. We wandered around everywhere. Didn't get home until four in the afternoon and then had to have a bobby round us up and show us the way."

"How distressing!" Mrs. Nicholson was much in earnest but the Englishman grinned joyously.

"Well—if that's what you call distressing," he said.

The heart of the city had been left behind. The car flashed along dreary, shop-lined suburban streets, past smug vine-covered villas with grille gates and shell-bordered paths, out into a region of ampler spaces and more pretentious dwellings, hidden away behind high brick walls. Finally it made a dive through an open gateway, ran along a private drive and came to a full stop before a dignified old house where an imposing personage in livery responded solemnly to Lord Bantholme's jovial greeting. The British peerage might forget itself but he 'oped 'e never did. Scores of motor cars were puffing and panting near at hand, horses were pawing

up the gravel, a flutter of gay frocks was disappearing through the wide doorway. Amelia and Laura May fairly groaned with rapture as they waited for the Earl to join them.

"I do so love the beginnings of things," Amelia remarked soulfully. "It's like the orchestra 'tuning up' at the opera or theatre. That always makes me feel excited and then the curtain goes up, and — oh, what a duck of a house, when you get inside!"

But they did not stay to examine the rambling rooms with their quaint old-world flavour; for beyond a second wide doorway an outdoor world was beckoning them, an alluring world of far-reaching, velvety turf, across whose vivid green surface long shadows pointed eastward, a world of wide-spreading, great-bodied trees, of sweet-scented flowering shrubs, of winding shadowy paths and silver-threading streams.

In the distance splashes of swift-moving colour marked the polo field, everywhere, women in light frocks were strolling, their silks and muslins glowing in the sunlight, melting into the shadows.

Near the house, tea tables were spread on the closely clipped terraces and already many of them were occupied. Laura May bent an inquiring eye upon the tea drinkers nearest her and sank weakly into a chair.

"I simply can't bear it. It's all too good to be true — and there's plum cake and strawberry jam!"

"And toasted muffins!" added Amelia, in the accents of one who sees a great light in darkness.

"Let's sit right here. I'm afraid to try to walk for fear I'll wake up."

"It's early for tea," objected Belinda.

"It's never early for tea."

"I thought perhaps we'd have tea rather early, and then we could go for a whirl out Richmond way and dine at the Star and Garter."

Amelia turned her blue eyes toward Lord Bantholme and contemplated him softly for a moment.

"Isn't he young to have such wonderful thoughts?" she asked of the group at large in hushed tones.

They consumed scandalous quantities of tea. Plum cake and muffins and jam melted away before them. Even the imperturbable waiter changed into something approaching human friendliness under the influence of their appreciation and their cheerful idiocy.

And Belinda was the idiot in chief, the most delectably and frivolously absurd of the group. Courtney had never seen her like this and he hugged the revelation to his heart. She was nearer, less alarming, more approachable. And she was friendly — at peace with all the world.

He had never liked Ranelagh. It occurred to him that he had often called it the dullest spot in London, and now he wondered vaguely at his former blindness.

Ranelagh, it seemed, was a place enchanted, joy-soaked, bliss evoking.

Even the advent of Count de Brissac, strolling across from the tennis courts with friends whom he promptly deserted to join Lord Bantholme's party, could not disturb the general serenity. Bantholme's face, for an instant, clouded, but the next moment relapsed into sunny content and when the time for departure came, he even expressed polite regret that the capacity of his machine would not permit him to offer the Count a seat.

"But there's the roadster," Laura May suggested. "Mr. Courtney could take somebody in that."

There was an almost imperceptible hesitation, then the Earl plunged valiantly into the breach.

"Why, yes. You wouldn't mind driving, Courtney. That would give us extra places in the big car. Count de Brissac, we are dining at the Star and Garter. If you have no other engagement ——"

"Delighted."

As they waited for the cars, Belinda grappled with the situation. Lord Bantholme would like to have Laura May in his car. That was obvious enough. The roadster would not be comfortable for Mrs. Nicholson — and Amelia must not be allowed to go alone with Courtney. The child shouldn't be married out of hand for her money if vigilant chaperoning could prevent.

And the result of all this reflection was that the big

car dashed off with Laura May beside the Earl in the front seat and Mrs. Nicholson, Amelia and the Count occupying the tonneau, while Jack Courtney, to his surprise and joy, found Belinda beside him in the roadster with the chauffeur on the rumble behind.

He was quiet as he followed the flying car through the sunset lights and shadows and the girl beside him misread his silence.

So he was sulky because he could not have Amelia, because he had to put up with her. A complimentary young man, this! It would serve him right if she should ——

A wicked twinkle crept into her eyes. Her lips curled into a smile. She looked sidewise at the man's clear-cut profile.

It would serve him quite right — and it wouldn't be unfair to Amelia. The girl hadn't really learned to care about him yet and he wasn't in love with her. He didn't care about anything except money. If one should make him care.—It might be a salutary lesson, and it would be one way of keeping Amelia out of trouble. To be sulky because he had to motor alone with her! There were men of excellent judgment who quite liked it. They had told her so.

Her smile trembled into a laugh — a low, mocking little laugh, which made Courtney turn to meet her eyes. They were laughing too.

"Alone with the chaperon. A tragedy in one act!" she said lightly.

He coloured.

"Call it comedy, Miss Carewe. Tragedies end unhappily."

"But one-act tragedies end quickly. That is in their favour."

"What guarantee have you that the play has only one act?"

"We dine at eight."

"The scene shifts. That is all."

Really the man was quite willing to play the game. It would be interesting to see him in earnest, when he could look at one like that, in jest. Poor susceptible Amelia! The chances were against her — unless —

"You'll let me drive you home to-night, Miss Carewe?"

Evidently he was resigned to the worst.

"I should enjoy it." She was very gentle and when Belinda was gentle she was exceedingly upsetting. "If you are sure it wouldn't be a bore for you?" Humility was even more upsetting than gentleness.

"A bore!" It was an eruption, but he remembered the chauffeur and checked the threatened lava flow.

"It would make me very happy," he said quietly.

Of course he couldn't mean it, but he had a way of saying things as though he meant them. If he should ever be in earnest, he might make love to some one very nicely

indeed. Most men bungled it so. They hadn't the eyes nor the mouth nor the voice for it.

"You *will* come?"

She was merely doing her duty by Amelia. That was understood; but the path of duty, so it seemed, was not invariably thorny. Occasionally one could get a beautiful slide on it.

"If you are sure you care to have me."

"Oh, I *care*."

They slipped into a forest gloom and ran through soft green dusks toward an opal west. As they came out into the open again, Courtney looked down at his companion. His face was grave, slightly puzzled, full of question, but he said nothing.

Violet shadows were gathering in the hollows of the downs, faint lights began to twinkle wanly, here and there in the distance; but the day lingered, scattering pale shreds of rose and blue and gold among the invading purples and grays. In the hush that had fallen, the throb of the motor seemed loud, insistent, and Courtney's voice, when he broke his silence, startled the girl beside him.

"Oh, Lord, yes, I *care*," he said grimly. His eyes were on the road ahead, his hand gripped the steering wheel tightly, his jaw was stubbornly set.

He lapsed into silence again and Belinda fumbled about in her brain for small talk, but the witchery of the

hour sealed her lips and set her heart and her fancy playing strange tricks.

She turned and looked at the automaton on the rumble. He was reassuringly commonplace, a flesh and blood tribute to prosaic everyday British conventions. One didn't fall in love with a man one hated, under the eyes of a person like Sykes. She was grateful to him.

The dinner at the Star and Garter was a success from every point of view. Hilarity reigned and Belinda was responsible for a large percentage of the hilarity. She was irrepressibly gay, irresistibly funny. Incidentally she was pretty, bewitchingly pretty. Even Lord Bantholme had moments when he wavered twixt black eyes and brown.

"Why do you twinkle, twinkle so, Miss Carewe?" he asked in mock dismay. "I'm afraid of you. You're elfish. I suspect you of traffic with the little people. I wouldn't dare try to motor you across running water."

"A star danced in Heaven and under that star I was born," Belinda quoted, "but I bow to my natal star only when I'm off duty. To-morrow I'll do violence to my birthright and walk soberly again."

Her mood lasted even when the dinner had ended and she and Courtney were speeding homeward through the summer night. No more eloquent silences. She was painstakingly conversational, clever, witty, but for personalities, serious talk, she left no loophole, and when

Courtney stopped the roadster before the boarding-house door, his face wore a look of disappointment altogether incompatible with the quality of the entertainment he had received.

“What’s the matter with Mr. Courtney?” Laura May asked as she watched him saying good night to Lord Bantholme and the Count. “He looks as cross as two sticks.”

“He’s an unappreciative soul, my dear,” Miss Carewe said sadly. “I’m afraid a first quality salon conversation is completely wasted on him.”

CHAPTER NINE

JACOBITES ALL

LORD BANTHOLME and Laura May had evolved the idea that Miss Carewe's party should motor down to Windsor on the last day of their London week. The Earl brought the invitation in person immediately after breakfast and delivered it to Miss Carewe and Mr. Perkins, whom he found in the drawing room.

"It's a rippin' morning," he added. "The cars will be around at ten."

But he had reckoned without Mr. Perkins. That gentleman stoutly refused to set foot in a motor car. He never had done it and he never would. Moreover, he waxed wroth over being urged to do it and sputtered with emotion in his effort to express the uncomplimentary things he thought about motor cars.

They should be suppressed by law. They had robbed the people of their highways, they were a stench in the nostrils, a menace to public safety, the curse of civilization. In a word, he talked as opinionated men do talk before they have acquired the motor habit. He had eaten fried sole for breakfast, and fish for breakfast never agreed with him.

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If Mrs. Bagby had been there to deal with him, the issue might have been different. She had a way of bringing him down to common sense with a thud that jarred him into speechless docility. But Mrs. Bagby had gone out to buy picture postals and Belinda quailed before the storm. Lord Bantholme, murmuring incoherent apologies, fled to the front hall. Here he was joined a moment later by Belinda who had stayed to assure the irate Mr. Perkins that he should make the Windsor trip by railway.

The noble Earl was mopping his brow and given over to noiseless mirth.

"Well, isn't he the human bromo seltzer?" he murmured, with an apprehensive glance toward the drawing room doors. "Does he go off like that, often, Miss Carewe? Keep him dry and in a dark place or you'll never get him back home. He'll just fizz himself away. My word, but didn't he effervesce all over the place!"

Belinda sat down on the stair steps and struggled with her risible muscles.

"I mustn't laugh. He'll be furious," she gasped, wiping her eyes — "but I've never seen him do it before. Wasn't he lovely? I'm sorry, though. The plan was beautiful."

Lord Bantholme sobered down suddenly.

"Wasn't it? I'm horribly disappointed. But, I say, Miss Carewe, you'll let me go along with you, anyway?"

Oh, I mean on the train. I wouldn't dare take a car near him. But it's your last day here and — oh well, Miss Carewe, you can see how things are with me, can't you?"

He sat down beside her on the step, looking boyish and embarrassed, but facing his hurdle manfully.

"Of course you're her chaperon, and you're the only one I can speak to. I can't get at her father, you know, and I want to do the decent thing. I don't know what she'd say herself. She doesn't know much about me, but I rather think — well, I'd chance it with her, only I don't want to go at the thing wrong end foremost just because she's off here away from her people. How do you think her father would feel about it?"

Belinda had very definite ideas about Father's attitude but refused to commit herself.

"You see, your newspapers have printed such a lot of rot about foreign men with titles. You'd think we were all blacklegs. Some of us are, but I'm a very decent sort. Honestly I am, Miss Carewe. That's not saying I'm collecting halos, you know. I'm not keen on halos, but I've always had a sort of feeling about the name and all that. The governor went it strong on the *noblesse oblige* business. He was the real thing. I haven't lived up to him, but the Bantholmes have usually gone pretty straight. Sort of a scratch lot on brains but not shy on morals, you know. You can get somebody to look

me up. Anybody — I don't care. I haven't accumulated any haunted past to speak of and my debts don't keep me awake nights."

"I wonder whether you understand that Laura May will not have any money — not a cent," said Belinda slowly.

Bantholme groaned.

"There you go. I suppose it was the mention of my debts. I don't owe anything except to my tailor and I'll pay him some day when I think his constitution's strong enough to stand the shock. No; it doesn't sound like the English lord in the books. I know it, but we aren't all pawning our lead pipe yet. Some of us are getting along very comfortably on our own, thank you, without assistance from American heiresses.

"Now look here, Miss Carewe. It isn't fair to pick out the conspicuous failures and fill the whole peerage with them. What if some of our worst have gone over and sold their titles in your market and then run amuck just as they always had before. Your women bought what they had to sell, didn't they? I don't know but what one side of the bargain is as savoury as the other. The men's records weren't private property. And from what I can read of your divorce courts the European nobility hasn't any corner on damaged morals and conjugal infelicity."

"Don't shoot!" implored Belinda.

He came to a full stop and looked shamefaced.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to howl and beat the air; but I don't want a wife with money. If she had any I'd take it out and lose it. I know a fellow that married a rich Manchester girl. He fell in love with her, you know, but it seemed lucky she had money because his daddy and granddaddy had gone through things pretty thoroughly. Then she went to work and repaired the Abbey. It took a thousand pounds to put on a tile roof and every time it rains she talks about being responsible for their having a roof over their heads, until he goes out and sits in the rain.

"I've got money enough to do us very well, and two or three good places that aren't plastered up with mortgages, and I'm wanting Miss Lee to marry me, not buy me. Do you think she will?"

"You must write to her father before you ask her."

"Before I say a word?"

"Before you say *the* word. I'll rely on you to wait."

"May I join you somewhere next month?"

"Will you promise not to propose to Laura May?"

"Pon honour."

Belinda held out her hand.

"You're a dear boy, if you do take the British peerage seriously. I'll write to Mr. Lee, myself."

With the leaving of London, Belinda's troubles loomed large once more. The week in the city had been full of

sightseeing but the whirling days revolved around a central axis. Mrs. Forbes-Wattles supplied a point of departure and return. Now came a continuous performance of train catching, cropping promiscuous herbage, sleeping in strange beds, dovetailing sights.

Cambridge was beautiful. Every one agreed about that; but the girls found it melancholy.

"It makes me sad, Miss Carewe. It really does," Amelia insisted. "It makes me think of all sorts of poems about deserted banquet halls and nevermore and lost opportunity and such things. The place is just lovely and boating on the Backs is a perfect dream, but it's all kind of like Hamlet with Hamlet left out. I could sit down anywhere and cry because there aren't university men swarming all over the place. Think of a Prom here, Laura May."

"Yale Proms are good enough for me," Laura May declared loyally.

"But Yale isn't picturesque and romantic like this."

"She hasn't got so much ivy and green mould but I'll bet she's got a better football team."

Evidently association with the British nobility had not yet undermined Laura May's patriotism.

Lincoln and York and Durham followed Cambridge in rapid succession.

"Talk about leaping from crag to crag!" Amelia remarked confidentially to Courtney as they sat on the

steps of Durham Cathedral waiting for the rest of the crowd to come up out of the crypt. "This leaping from cathedral to cathedral would kill a chamois. Isn't it funny how excited Mr. Perkins can get over saw-tooth marks on a column in a coal hole; and when Mrs. Nicholson came around the corner suddenly and saw Lincoln Cathedral she cried. She really did. She said it was so big and glorious and she'd never seen a cathedral before and it just all came over her how that wonderful thing had stood there for centuries praising God. She was perfectly sweet about it but I guess there's something the matter with me. Now honestly, Mr. Courtney, just between friends, do you know whether Durham's early English or Norman or Gothic or Brooklyn?"

Courtney confessed shamelessly that he didn't.

"Well, do you care?"

He didn't.

"That's a comfort. Even Laura May's getting so she talks about clerestories and transition periods and apses as if she'd invented them. I reckon she thinks she's likely to come over here and live among them so she may as well get used to them. It's funny but I always had an idea that an apse was some sort of a bug that Cleopatra killed herself with. Miss Carewe says that was an asp. I never could spell. If I didn't have such a splendid time not being clever I'd be awfully discouraged about myself, Mr. Courtney."

She looked uncommonly young and bonny against the grim gray stone of the cathedral wall and a half-pathetic droop in the corners of her mouth made her pink and white prettiness even more inconsequently babyish than usual. Courtney reflected guiltily that if he hadn't been fathoms deep in love with somebody quite different, he would certainly have kissed her and told her not to cry. She was the type of girl to whom brilliant elderly statesmen and hard-headed railway presidents talk baby talk without realizing that they are lapsing from their native methods of speech, and when she looked dejected as she did now, the normal man felt uneasily that something ought to be done about it.

"Half the people who rave over cathedrals don't know any more about them than you do," Courtney said consolingly, but she refused to be comforted.

"They enjoy them, though. That's the awful thing about me. I don't really enjoy them — except the gargoyles. I believe I am just completely discouraged about myself."

"No, you're not. You're hungry. It's tea time."

Amelia's face lightened perceptibly.

"Maybe that is it. I knew I felt queer. But then that's discouraging too. It's simply awful, but I actually believe that what I'm going to remember best about places in Europe is what I had to eat in them. Someway or other, when I look back that's all that seems to stand out."

“You’ll like Edinburgh,” Courtney prophesied.

She didn’t look altogether hopeful.

“I don’t know — maybe. Are bannocks good?”

She did like Edinburgh. Who doesn’t like Edinburgh? And then there was Mrs. Dalkeith. Mrs. Dalkeith’s daughter took lodgers, Mrs. Dalkeith entertained them — when she felt so inclined; and to be entertained by the little old Highland lady was to lose one’s heart to Scotland for all time, to become a ranting Jacobite, to soak up Scottish history and romance at every pore.

Belinda and she were already fast friends and when Belinda’s party wandered into Number One, Castle Terrace, late on Saturday afternoon, Mrs. Dalkeith, in her black silk and Sunday mutch, was waiting in her own room with a bright fire burning on the hearth, and tea brewing.

“Mother says, when you’ve laid off your things will you come to her for a drop of tea?” the landlady announced, and half an hour later Amelia was weeping copiously over the lost cause, and even Mr. Perkins had allowed historic fact to falter and fall before the onslaught of Gaelic romance.

How was one to remember Stuart failings when a descendant of Highland chieftains, sitting bolt upright in the firelight and tossing her cap strings back recklessly was singing, “Wha’ll be King but Charlie?” in a sweet, thin, high voice through which the spirit of a warlike

clan thrilled and throbbed? How was a curly-headed sentimentalist to check her tears when she heard "Better lo'ed ye canna be, will ye no come back again?" for the first time, from Highland lips and a Highland heart? And for that matter, Amelia cried over everything in Edinburgh. Her pretty nose was pink for five successive days; for she was started right that first night, and, if you are started right in old Edinboro toun you go about with your heart swelling and your throat aching and your brain a-dream.

"When I'm not crying because I'm sorry, I'm crying because I'm excited," Amelia explained. "It doesn't make any difference whether it's a 'Better lo'ed ye canna be' kind of a thing or a 'Scots wha' hae' kind of a thing. I have to cry over it just the same."

What Mrs. Dalkeith had begun there in the firelight, Saturday night, the soldiers from the castle completed when they came marching down to church at St. Giles on Sunday.

Belinda had been looking forward to that Sunday herself.

"It's always the one big moment of the trip, for me," she confessed to Courtney. She had a way of taking him into her confidence now that gave him more emotions than any assortment of Jacobite ballads.

"You could pile all the picture galleries and ruins and churches in a heap and give me my choice of seeing them

or of seeing the Black Watch go swinging down the High Street, and I'd turn my back on the heap. What's culture compared with thrills?"

So *she* knew what to expect when she led her party out into the sanctified Scottish Sabbath, but Amelia and Laura May were unprepared and the shock of joy coming upon them suddenly, bereft them of what little semblance of sanity Nature had accorded them.

They heard the band as they hurried along a side street toward the line of march and Belinda quickened her step to a jog trot, regardless of her elderly charges, who were already lagging far behind.

"We're late," she said to the girls and Courtney trotting at her side. Nearer and nearer came the music.

"We'll have to run for it," gasped the chaperon; and throwing dignity to the winds she suited action to the word. Pell mell they rushed down the narrow street, bringing up, breathless, on a corner from which they could look toward the Castle.

There they came, the braw laddies, kilts fluttering, sporans swaying, cap ribbons waving in the wind, their absurd caps rakishly a-tilt, their sturdy legs stretching out in rhythmic stride.

Nowhere else on earth is there marching like it. Not in all the battalions of the world is there anything to match the triumphant swing of it. The man who can see the Black Watch and their mates go by without a

thrill is so dead that a coroner's certificate would be a work of supererogation. As for the women — well, it was natural enough that Laura May and Amelia should hug each other for joy in the sight, but Courtney noted as an amazing tribute to the lads in kilts, that when they had passed, he found himself holding Belinda's hand and that haughty young woman apparently quite oblivious of the fact.

"Let's follow them," urged Amelia, and they followed them, full tilt down the middle of the street, hearts swelling, cheeks aglow, lost to all thought of decorum — followed them until they were swallowed up in St. Giles.

There, Belinda came out of her trance.

"Where are Mr. Perkins and the others?" she asked, looking desperately up the street. "We ran away from them. It's dreadful. What will they think of me! Come girls, we must go back."

The girls rebelled.

"They'll come along after a while, and they'll want to see the soldiers come out if they missed them before. Let's wait until after service, Miss Carewe."

Unable to secure seats, they waited outside, Belinda, with eyes watching for the belated, the girls all agog with anticipation.

"I don't feel as if I could bear it," Amelia groaned, when a stir inside the church announced that the apparition would be upon her again in a moment or two.



There they came — the braw laddies

"If I fall in a fit, Miss Carewe, don't mind me. Run right on after them. I wish, if I'm going to fall, I'd do it in front of them so that they'd march over me."

There was the tramp, tramp of marching feet, a flutter of motion and colour in the gray doorway.

Away up the hill went the kilties, the bagpipes skirling them up as the band played them down; and behind them sprinted two pretty girls, red-cheeked, excited, deaf to the exhortation and pleading of a third pretty girl at their heels.

The pipers had completed the utter demoralization of scruples already tottering to their fall. Amelia and Laura May didn't even know they were behaving shockingly. If they had known, they wouldn't have cared. Only shortage of breath prevented their shouting "The Campbells are coming" as they ran.

When Belinda and Courtney finally overtook them, they were sitting limply on a gun carriage in the Castle Yard while a slow-pacing guard studied them with interest and appreciation. They looked up as their chaperon appeared but had no apologies to offer, felt no need of apologies.

"I was gooseflesh all over," announced Amelia, in the colourless, impersonal accents of one who has lived through an experience exhausting the whole range of human emotion.

"The officers had dirks in their stockings," sighed

Laura May dreamily, as one who recounts marvels seen in a beatific vision.

Belinda led them home and fed them, but even food was wasted upon them in their exalted mood and they fled as quickly as possible to Mrs. Dalkeith's room, where for the rest of the day they waded through the gore of fause Southron lords.

"I don't believe Lord Bantholme can be all English," said Laura May as she settled herself for sleep that night. "It seems as if he *must* have some Scottish blood."

"He'd be lovely in kilts," murmured Amelia drowsily.

CHAPTER TEN

LORD BANTHOLME DISPROVES THE THEORY THAT ENGLISHMEN ARE SLOW

PARTING from Edinburgh was a melancholy business but only Amelia and the heavens wept and the thing had become a matter of habit with both of them.

"I'm not sure what I'm crying about," Amelia explained, wiping her eyes on a Royal Stuart tartan silk muffler for which she was trying to find a place in her trunk. "I wish I hadn't bought anything more this morning. I oughtn't to have gone out at all but I did need some baby ribbon dreadfully. And then when I went down on Princes Street I forgot what I'd gone for and bought plaid things and cairngorms and dirk paper-knives. I don't see how anybody could buy baby ribbon on Princes Street. It's the Castle that always upsets me. No matter where you go there's the splendid old pile frowning down at you and daring you to think about everyday things. The minute I see it, something begins to hum inside of me and then I hear pipes playing and claymores clashing and see beacon lights burning and troops mustering and

I'm off fighting for Prince Charlie and sacrificing all my sons for him and being beheaded and stuck up on gate posts for him — and how's anybody to remember pale blue baby ribbon when she's feeling like that?"

Laura May nodded mournful understanding.

"It's going to be terrible slow when we get back to having ordinary feelings," she prophesied gloomily.

They were still sombre when they said good-bye to Mrs. Dalkeith, but the old lady's last words cheered them considerably.

"Dinna greet, lassies," she said. "Ye'll be comin' back. The auld toun aye draws them back. And ye'll be bringing the lads ye luve to let me mak' Jacobites o' them. I'll teach ye a' a bit o' the Gaelic. D'ye ken there's thirty-five words for 'darlin'' in the Gaelic? Oh, ay; it's the gran' tongue for luve makin' is the Gaelic. Ye get such a g-r-rip o' the words."

The girls were quiet on the way to the station, but as the train pulled out, Amelia voiced their common thought.

"Don't the Scotch girls have all the luck!" she said with an envious sigh. "Think of having a lover that wore kilts and talked Gaelic!"

"But wouldn't he be a holy show on Broadway?" Courtney suggested.

His point of view made an impression.

"Yes," Amelia admitted. "You do need a lot of them

together, and one couldn't marry a regiment — and nobody'd want to live here and be damp and excited all her life. But there's nothing like them, nothing at all like them."

She leaned forward and blew a kiss from her fingertips toward the Castle.

The Trossachs veiled their heads in mist. Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond were leaden gray under a beating rain.

Glasgow was dour and inhospitable for three hours, and the Burns country was "a bit saft." Even the inn-keeper at Ayr acknowledged that, and he was a conservative body who refused to abandon his attitude of suspicious reserve even for Belinda, though he did relax slightly under her smiles.

"Ye'll no be American?" he hazarded as he led her to look at rooms.

"Oh, yes."

"Then ye'll no be frae the States?"

"Indeed I am. Why not?"

He retired into himself and pretended he had not heard the question.

"What made you think I wasn't American?" Belinda insisted.

He gave her a sidewise glance.

"Weel," he explained cautiously, "you're no sae pronoonced as some."

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And in the light of past experience with touring fellow countrymen, Belinda understood what he meant.

At Stratford, the sun was shining. The phenomenon called forth unqualified approval from all of the party and moved Laura May to disloyalty.

"Of course, Scotland was splendid," she began. There was a depreciatory note in the prelude and every one looked at her in surprise. "But sleeping on the heather and 'pu'ing gowans fine' and all those stunts in the songs would be mighty wet and cold and uncomfortable. I don't believe the Highlanders deserved such a lot of credit for fighting all the time, after all. They had to do it to keep warm. Edinburgh was splendid, but I'm glad to get some place where I can dry out. I believe I'm mildewed."

"I wish we'd come out in a place where we could just dry and didn't have to do anything else."

Amelia had a Baedeker in her hand and looked discouraged.

"There's such a lot of Shakespeare and he's so important you can't very well skip him. I do hate men like that. A tomb's all right and I don't mind seeing where somebody was born, when it's just a house and you don't have to do anything but look at it, but I don't think it's fair to make it into a museum. And then if you've got to see where he went to school and where he courted his wife and where he sat under a mulberry tree and where he

got arrested and things like that, you haven't hardly any time left for enjoying yourself and buying souvenirs and photographs. We'd better start out right away, Miss Carewe."

Mr. Perkins had gradually grown accustomed to Amelia. Her unfailing good nature and readiness to serve him in little ways had tempered his disapproval, and her prettiness had moved him to tolerance. Even a hypochondriac is also a man. But her attitude toward Shakespeare was too much for his forbearance. He led Belinda aside.

"Miss Carewe, if you will take that flighty young person and anybody who can stand her, with you and let me make the holy pilgrimages of this sacred place without a sacrilegious poll parrot at my elbow, I'll be very grateful to you. She amuses me at times — but not here — not here."

Belinda hastily agreed to the proposition. He showed signs of fizzing and she remembered Lord Bantholme's advice to keep him dry and in a dark place. Moreover, she understood how he felt. She would have felt that way herself on her first visit to Stratford, but four pilgrimages had dulled her enthusiasm to such a degree that she felt reconciled to skipping the mulberry tree, if nothing more.

So Mr. Perkins and his sister, Mrs. Bagby and Mrs. Nicholson went forth with rapt faces turned toward the

Birthplace, and the other four graceless members of the party stood in the doorway of the hotel wavering between the tomb and the courting place.

A joyous honking was borne to them on the summer breeze. Two big motor cars came plunging down the street. The four viewed them without excitement. Motors were thick as souvenir paper weights in Stratford. But if they were calm, the driver of the first car was not. As he caught sight of them he wrung a wild exultant shriek from his horn and let out a yell of welcome which brought startled tradespeople to their shop windows.

A moment later, Lord Bantholme was shaking hands with the four Americans and the impassive Sykes in the second car was waiting for orders.

"But I thought you were to join us at Oxford," said the chaperon.

"Oh, what's the use?" inquired the Earl vaguely but conclusively. "I figured you'd be around this neighbourhood somewhere and that I could find you by skimming around a bit. Struck it right, the very first try. Where were you going?"

They explained the situation and offered him a choice between the cottage and the tomb.

"Why not go boating?" he asked with an air of hurt surprise. He was disappointed in them. Their imaginations were evidently barren.

The girls hailed him as one bearing glad tidings.

Courtney's face expanded into a smile of relief. Only Belinda, handicapped by a sense of responsibility, insisted that the girls must see the sights starred in Baedeker, and her objections were overruled.

"I can show them all to you in a half-hour, with the car," Lord Bantholme assured her. "We'll do it when we come back. This is such a rippin' morning for a row."

They went, and, as the church spire faded out of sight and the village was left behind, spirits soared and laughter came freely.

"It's all wrong, you know," Belinda confided to Courtney. "I ought to have led them around solemnly and told them what to feel — but they wouldn't have felt it. It's so hard for any body to feel the real things in Stratford now. I think the word smug must have been invented to fit the place. It's so horribly thriving and clean and prosperous — all on a dead man's bones, and it is so tourist-ridden. Shakespeare's the best comrade in the world, but not in Stratford. All his winged fancy has been translated into hard cash here. I wonder whether he loved boating on the Avon. He seems nearer here than he did in the town."

The boat stole around the curve of an island, thick set with waving rushes, crept along under overhanging willows, held its course between low green banks beyond which broad meadows wandered away to meet far wooded

hills, passed huge rambling old houses bowered in tree and vine and shrub.

"It's all so green, so green, so green," chanted Amelia in time with the dip of the oars.

"And so peaceful," added Belinda dreamily.

"And so jolly far away from the museum. Whenever you want to eat, there's a motor hamper under the stern seat."

Lord Bantholme was happy but not poetic.

They scorned his carnal suggestion; but, an hour or two later, sitting on a grassy bank under a spreading tree, with the boat moored close beside them, they went through that hamper like a devouring locust horde.

And then, while the two men stretched out at full length on the thick, green turf, smoked silently, and the girls, quiet, for once, idly watched the rippling water and the cloud-shadows afloat on the meadow, Belinda read snatches from a little leather-bound copy of "As You Like It," which she had bought in the hotel that morning, and Courtney, watching her from beneath a hat pulled low over his eyes, mutely called her Rosalind and echoed Orlando's love words in his heart.

It was late in the afternoon when the boat was tied up to her dock one more; and the motor flight by which the chaperon eased her conscience before supper was almost as brief as Lord Bantholme had planned. Even so, they did not have time to see Anne Hathaway's cottage, but the Earl consoled them for that. "We'll stroll over there

to-night in the moonlight," he said. "That's what Shakespeare used to do if he was the foxy boy I think he was; and I'd rather walk with him than ride out in a barouche and be shown through the house at sixpence a head. Who wants to see the inside of the bally old house anyway? Anne isn't living there now and, if she does come back, I'll bet she and William haunt the garden and the doorsteps on moonlight summer nights."

They saw Anne Hathaway's garden lying white in the moonlight and sweet with the scent of mignonette and roses dew-wet, and they came back between the hedges along the village street, with lingering steps.

"After all, I believe a fellow might be a poet in Stratford even now — if he burned his Baedeker," said Courtney.

Mrs. Bagby was alone in the reading room when the younger members of her party reached the hotel after their walk, and Lord Bantholme straightway led her aside and organized an offensive and defensive alliance with her.

"You see, I'd like to drive the whole crowd over to Warwick and Kenilworth and on down to Oxford and London," he explained, "but Mr. Perkins won't go."

"Why not?"

He told the story of the last motor invitation.

Mrs. Bagby sniffed contemptuously.

"Poppycock!"

"But you should have seen him. I wouldn't dare mention a motor to him. I wouldn't even have the nerve to speak of anything beginning with M where he could hear me."

"I'll tell him we are going."

Bantholme looked at her with admiration and awe.

"Talk about your thin red line of 'eroes!"

"You leave him to me, son. He'll go."

After breakfast the next morning, she cornered Mr. Perkins in the parlor and laid down the law to him. He raved, he fumed, he expressed his clearly defined opinion of automobiles. She listened, placid and unmoved.

"I won't go, Madame, I won't go. I've never ridden in one of the infernal things ——"

"That's why you hate them," Mrs. Bagby explained soothingly. "They do say it makes a heap of difference whether you're running over people or being run over. And anyway, we women want to go in automobiles and you may as well make up your mind to it. That's what you get for being a man. We can't vote, but we make up for it by not counting the men's votes except at general elections. You're too young to be allowed your own way, Mr. Perkins. 'Tain't good for you. And you ought to keep up with the times too, even if you have to travel by motor to do it. You've fooled around with mummies and Babylonian tablets and such until you think you're as old as they are, instead of being just in

your prime. That's how you've got the idea you aren't able to do things. A man with a brain like yours can do whatever he wants to do. That ain't Christian Science either. That's just horse sense. Look how you played shuffleboard! I expect you could run a car as easy as look. Maybe you'd like it. People miss lots of fun just by not finding out what fun they're missing. Now you come along and don't pretend you are a fidgety old man when you're not."

Mr. Perkins went along. He even swelled his chest and straightened his shoulders. When a man was in his prime, there was no reason why he should stoop.

He was given the place of honour on the front seat of the car which the Earl himself was to drive. Moreover, the driving was of a conservative sort which brought an expression of pain to the ordinarily emotionless face of Sykes, following in the other car, and Lord Bantholme's conversation showed a surprising tendency to run along lines of historic research. Not for nothing had he boned up on guide books during the early morning hours.

Mr. Perkins's mood softened, expanded.

"Do you know, I find motoring quite refreshing. Upon my word I really do. There's something one might call exhilarating about it."

Lord Bantholme promptly let the car out a notch or two, but the little man beside him paid no attention to

the increase in speed. He was watching with placid interest two plunging horses attached to a farm cart.

"People really ought to keep their horses off the public roads if they are afraid of automobiles," he said peevishly, as he looked back over his shoulder to see the end of the struggle, and a subdued chuckle sounded from the tonneau where Mrs. Bagby, with laughter wrinkles round her eyes, had been listening to the conversation on the front seat.

Gradually that conversation drifted around to Oxford. Lord Bantholme was positively illuminating on the subject of Oxford.

"I'm a Christ Church man myself," he explained, and he embarked upon an account of the historic and archæological treasures of Oxfordshire which moved Mr. Perkins to something like excitement.

Just there, Mrs. Bagby lost track of the conversation. The car was running along the main street of a little village and a butcher's boy apparently plunged under the front wheels.

The car stopped with a jerk, the women shut their eyes, Mrs. Nicholson screamed; but Mr. Perkins's voice rose irritated but reassuring.

"He's all right, ladies. That was a narrow escape, Lord Bantholme, a very narrow escape. You were extremely quick. It's queer how clumsy and careless people are about getting in the way of cars — criminally

careless I should say. It must be most annoying for a driver. You tooted your horn distinctly twice."

Mrs. Bagby, still nerve-shaken, laughed weakly.

"Didn't I tell you it made a difference whether you were the chaser or the chasee?" she asked, but her question was ignored.

It was while the party was lunching, that day, in the dining room of the Warwick Arms, that Mr. Perkins's newly acquired interest in Oxfordshire flowered into expression.

"Lord Bantholme has made a very delightful proposal," he began blandly.

The Earl looked modest. Every one else looked curious.

"It seems he has a place in Oxfordshire," Mr. Perkins continued. "The district is a very interesting one, Miss Carewe, very. I don't mean to be officious in making the suggestion. I know you have your route mapped out and your plans all made. I don't even know that it would be possible to change, but the young gentleman thinks that I would be deeply interested. It seems the British village is quite near Bantholme Hall, and archæologists consider it most important. And Godstow Nunnery is a twelfth-century ruin, and then there are several moated dwelling houses and Oxford itself is within easy reach. The Bodleian library ought not to be passed over hastily. There are some rare old volumes in the Bantholme library, too. "Now, if we could accept the

Earl's invitation for a few days without disarranging your plans too much and disappointing the ladies —— ”

Belinda turned to Lord Bantholme. He met her quizzical look with the utmost solemnity. Mrs. Bagby choked over her fish. The girls waited breathlessly.

“It would put you to a great inconvenience, Lord Bantholme.”

“Not at all, Miss Carewe. I've an old housekeeper there who's always ready for me. She's one of my failures. I began proposing to her when I was four. It isn't a bad old place, you know. I think you'd like it. Do say you'll come.”

She looked at the two eager girls, at Mrs. Nicholson smiling assent, at Mrs. Bagby beaming upon the diplomat, at Courtney, appreciatively a-grin, and accepted the invitation.

“Is there a moat?” asked Laura May, as they motored to Kenilworth that afternoon. She had supplanted Mr. Perkins on the front seat.

“No; but there's a family ghost.”

“And a rose garden?”

“A corker.”

“And a sun-dial?”

“Well, rather.”

“And a brick wall with fruit trees all spread out against it.”

“Wait till you see it.”

“And tea on the lawn?”

"With scones and jam."

"It sounds like Heaven."

"You could make it a heaven on earth for me."

And then there was silence on that front seat, a rich, creamy silence in which Laura May heard and counted her heartbeats.

"I've heard that Englishmen were slow," Mrs. Bagby was saying to Belinda in the other car, "but that lad seems to have quite a momentum. I'd have said you couldn't drag Mr. Perkins to Bantholme Hall, and now he's dragging us there. That cherub-faced British infant has made him believe the whole visit is planned entirely on his account. I wonder if there really are any ruins and mouldy old books. I suppose you know what's going to happen, Miss Carewe?"

Belinda nodded.

"Well, you're her chaperon and I must say he's sort of changed my ideas about foreign noblemen, but what will her folks say to you if you let her take up with somebody they've never seen?"

The chaperon smiled. She knew Laura May's mother.

"They will dedicate a family altar to me and burn candles on it, dear Lady. He's an English Earl, and a wealthy English Earl. And he's a darling," she added quickly. "That's the real reason why I'm not interfering."

The tale of the historic spots unvisited, the early Italian madonnas unseen, the tombs on which no tear was

dropped, the famous statues neglected, all in order that the Carewe party might spend a week at Bantholme Hall without utterly demoralizing Miss Barnes's carefully arranged schedule, will never be told.

Belinda cut and slashed with ruthless hand and clear conscience. Had not the vote for the change been unanimous and enthusiastic?

"Cut out all the backachy things," Amelia urged. "This is something Cook's parties don't do. Anybody that comes over here can talk about Cologne Cathedral and the Venus de Milo and the Sistine Madonna. I'm not going to bother about that when I go home, but I rather guess I'll have Spartaville, Georgia, going when I begin to drop remarks about the way they serve melons at Bantholme Hall, and the afternoon Lord Bantholme's Panhard carried us a hundred miles between luncheon and tea time, and just casually refer to the Earl's tenantry and kennels and orchids. "Good gracious! Spartaville won't care whether I know Raphael from Howard Chandler Christy."

The days of the visit were fleet-footed. The ruins and libraries fulfilled Mr. Perkins's fondest expectations and the companionship of a vicar soaked in archæological and scholarly lore filled his cup to the brim. Lord Bantholme assigned a car and chauffeur to them and turned them loose.

Mrs. Bagby established friendly relations with the housekeeper, fraternized with the head gardener and

farmer, and accumulated a wealth of knowledge about English soils and fertilizers and maid servants and butchers' bills. Miss Perkins found a kindred soul in the vicar's wife and went about with her distributing tea and tracts and underwear and advice to the cottagers, while Mrs. Nicholson was content to wander about the box-bordered walks of the wonderful old garden, to doze in the sunshine on the terrace where the peacocks trailed their gorgeous blues and greens, to drink tea out of old Lowestoft that filled her heart with joy, and to be waited upon by noiseless, deft-handed servants such as she had dreamed of in imaginative mood.

"Isn't it a blessing to see the dear things having what they individually love, instead of what is collectively good for them?" Belinda said to Courtney. This week was an oasis in the desert of responsibility for her and her soul was stretching itself luxuriously and taking its ease. Dust would have collected on her Baedeker had the housekeeping tenets admitted dust; but Thyrsis and The Scholar Gipsy travelled in her coat pocket. It was a surprise to her to find that Courtney knew his Arnold, too. One didn't expect young men with broad shoulders and laughing eyes and rampant spirits to quote

"Sweet William with his homely cottage smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow;
Roses that down alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden trees,
And the full moon and the white evening star,"

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when one strolled down garden paths with him in the long English gloaming — but it was rather pleasant to find that a man could love poetry even if his circulation was good and his digestion unimpaired.

She tried to read “Thyrsis” to Lord Bantholme and the girls one day as they punted up the Cherwell to Islip, but she did not get beyond

“In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same.”

Both Amelia and Laura May took exception to the Hinkseys and refused to hear more from a man capable of dragging towns of that name into a poem.

Lord Bantholme came to the defense of his neighbourhood.

“What’s the matter with the Hinkseys?” he asked in an injured tone. “There’s a bully walk up past South Hinksey to Boar’s Hill. The poetry may be slush. I can’t stand poetry myself; but the Hinkseys are all right.”

After that Belinda turned only to Courtney for sympathy with poetic moods, and that young man called down blessings upon the head of the once execrated Yale professor who, being a devotee of Arnold himself, had tried by every means short of surgery to force appreciation of that poet into the heads of unreceptive students. A common taste in poetry is a potent thing in a midsummer world.

Such a beautiful English midsummer world it was, where the sun was not too hot nor the breeze too cool;

a world of forest glades and sunlit meadows and green muffled hills and winding country lanes; a world where one lingered among beechen greens, floated along capricious winding streams, dallied in rose-sweet, old-world gardens and stole out through moonlight and night shadows to hear the nightingales sing.

Even the towns shared the glamour. Was not Oxford a place of picturesque, haunted streets and still, green quadrangles, of enchanted garden closes and lime-tree walks and gray arches and fairy towers?

"Oh, the poor, poor people who don't see anything in England except the sights," groaned Amelia on the last afternoon of the visit.

"I never realized how new and nervous we are over in America until now. I've visited at big country houses over there, but they hadn't had time to settle and everything was raw around the edges."

"Horrid word, 'raw'!" objected Laura May.

"Yes, isn't it horrid? So's the thing. Everything is done all the way through, here."

"Overdone in spots." Lord Bantholme looked ruefully at a crumbling wing of the hall which cried out for restoration.

"No, it isn't spotty. That's just it." Amelia was getting involved.

"It's all of a beautiful consistency," said Belinda, coming to the rescue. "Everything rhymes. I never

knew what peace was before. The house is peaceful, the country is peaceful, the life is peaceful. I suppose there is strife and suffering outside somewhere, but they don't touch one in these English country homes."

"Oh, yes, they do." The Earl's jolly boyish face took on a hint of gravity for the moment. "There are undercurrents, Miss Carewe. It isn't all beer and skittles for the luckiest of us, and no honest Englishman's satisfied with English conditions to-day."

"Now you're going to talk politics," interrupted Amelia. "And English politics are so ghastly serious. Let's not have it on our last afternoon. I'd rather believe all the world is as beautiful as this and everybody in it as satisfied as I am."

"Shall we have some tennis before tea?" Lord Bantholme rose lazily, the earnestness fading from his face.

"No, croquet," Belinda amended. "Croquet's so beautifully English. I've put on white muslin and blue ribbons on purpose, and the curate's coming for tea."

"The deuce he is!"

She nodded serenely.

"Yes, I met him yesterday when I went down to the village with Mr. Perkins and the vicar and it struck me right away how well he'd go with blue ribbons and croquet, so I invited him."

"Why, I don't believe I know the fellow."

"That's what he said. He's new here, but I told him

you'd be delighted to have him, just the same. You don't mind, do you? He's pink and white and bashful — exactly like the curates in English novels. That's why I invited him. You needn't bother about him, you know. I'll take care of him. He'll be easy to take care of if one doesn't frighten him."

The complete and utter demoralization of that unfortunate pink and white curate was Belinda's last achievement at Bantholme Hall. When he departed after staying for dinner and passing a blissful but agitated evening, she waved him farewell from the terrace and dropped back in her chair with a contented sigh.

"Don't talk to me about fiction being misleading," she said. "I feel as if I'd read the man instead of spending the evening with him. Now I can't think of anything lacking in this visit, Lord Bantholme — unless you could come of age and have rejoicing tenantry and booths and refreshments and fireworks and speeches. That always reads well, but it's rather late in the evening for it and we are going so early in the morning. The curate says he always gets up early anyway."

Some one else must have risen early, on that last morning; for, before Belinda had left her bed, she heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravel and a sheaf of deep-hearted yellow roses came hurtling through the window and dropped upon the floor beside her.

None like them grew in the Hall gardens but she

remembered having seen them running riot over a cottage at Nuneham one day as they motored by and having wished for a bunch of them.

Only one person had heard the spoken wish.

She buried her face in the roses and kept it hidden there for a few minutes, but not long enough for a tell-tale flush to die.

"It's a pity he's horrid," she said to herself with a wishful curve of the lips.

"But," she added firmly, "he is."

Then she put the roses carefully in water.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CAREWE PARTY DODGES 156 PAGES OF SIGHTS AND
IS PROUD OF IT

IN London, Belinda found a cablegram from Laura May's father.

"Your letter and Earl's received. No objection. Push matter. Writing."

Her first impulse was to repeat a part of the message to Lord Bantholme. On second thoughts, she decided not to mention it. The two young things could afford to wait and Laura May would probably be incapacitated for rational sightseeing as soon as she was definitely engaged.

So the Earl was told that if he heard favourably from Mr. Lee, he might join the party in Paris; and, with that crumb of comfort was left standing in the Great Eastern station, staring disconsolately at the departing train.

Of course he hadn't the faintest idea of waiting for Paris and of course the flinty-hearted chaperon didn't expect him to wait and would have scorned him if he had been willing to do it, but for the time being he was alone

in London. None of the five million souls stranded there with him was of sufficient importance to be counted.

He took a cab to his club and sat down to write to Laura May. One must kill time in some way.

A week later, he received an answer to the letter he had written Mr. Lee, a dignified answer full of feeling and well rounded periods. Laura May's father was a Virginia colonel and he knew an opening for rhetoric when he saw one. He mentioned his family here and there throughout the twenty pages. One might almost say that he insisted upon the Lees. He dwelt touchingly upon the part Laura May had played in the home circle. He showed no unseemly eagerness in regard to the proposed alliance. Indeed, he acknowledged that selfishness prompted him to forbid the banns, but that affection for his daughter was stronger than personal interest. If she loved the Earl her parents would put aside their natural prejudices and with bleeding hearts give their consent to the union. Incidentally he mentioned that he had written to the London solicitors to whom Lord Bantholme had referred him and had received a satisfactory response.

It was a very noble letter. Belinda wept tears of joy and appreciation over it when Lord Bantholme showed it to her later by way of credentials. Reduced to essentials the five sheets constituted a parental blessing and,

having grasped the vital fact, the Earl sent for a Bradshaw and ordered his trunk packed.

But here the Fates interposed to prevent the course of true love from running smooth and upsetting well-established tradition. Lord Bantholme came down with the measles.

The situation was a trying one for a belted Earl and a lover. Even the most interesting and fatal of diseases would have been inopportune. Measles was humiliating. No man could be expected to write to the lady of his heart and tell her that he was kept from her side by measles.

The Earl wrote of illness. He didn't go into particulars but he hinted darkly at complications and gave the impression that his case was an unusual and alarming one, though he hoped to avoid serious trouble.

The letter overtook the Carewe party at Heidelberg, where they were resting after a kinetoscope view of Holland and a hot and wearisome journey down the Rhine.

Laura May promptly lost her appetite and her interest in scarred students and made havoc of hotel stationery. Mr. Perkins was deeply interested and hinted darkly at hereditary heart trouble.

"His father died of angina pectoris," he said gloomily. "These old families you know. Run down. Run down."

But then Mr. Perkins had been in pessimistic mood ever since leaving England. He was convinced that Holland was too damp to be healthful, he was disappointed

in Cologne Cathedral, he disapproved of the Rhine, he resented the fact that neither Dutch nor Germans could talk English.

"If they even knew Latin!" he said with profound disgust, after a fruitless effort to buy pennyroyal from a druggist who expressed his despair in German, French and Italian and looked on with alarm while the American went through a pantomime of buzzing and biting like a mosquito.

Mrs. Bagby, too, objected to the gross stupidity of persons who did not speak English. She even regarded them with a certain suspicion and could not rid herself of a fixed idea that stubbornness, not ignorance, was at the bottom of the offender's behaviour and that if she talked English loud enough and insistently enough, they would understand.

"Don't you bother, Miss Carewe," she would say cheerfully, if Belinda offered assistance. "They've got to learn English some time and they may as well begin right now."

The rest of the party got along, after a fashion, Belinda and Courtney speaking something approaching German, the others mixing English, French and dumb show, but nobody was quite happy.

An occasional German officer in all his gorgeousness roused Laura May from sentimental reverie and moved Amelia to excitement. The Zoo at Frankfort fulfilled

Mrs. Bagby's wildest hopes; but aside from these breaks in the dullness art and nature pallied upon the travellers and the young woman who was conducting them felt as apologetic as though personally responsible for the Rhine, the heat, the language and the German cooking.

Things grew worse as the trip progressed. Mr. Perkins insisted upon visiting Homburg. A physician in Cincinnati had once told him that Homburg was the place of places for his cure and having come within a few hours' ride of the Mecca it seemed flying in the face of Providence to pass the heaven-sent opportunity by. Miss Carewe pointed out that as one day was all they could possibly give to the health resort, a thorough cure was hardly to be expected; but she bought tickets for Homburg. Anything to amuse the disgruntled. Feeding them had ceased to be a resource in Germany.

They arrived in Homburg at night. The next morning, Mr. Perkins arose early and went forth. He had only one day and he proposed to do all that was humanly possible toward making himself a well man. Unluckily he had a variety of interesting maladies and there was a choice assortment of springs. There was not time for looking up a doctor and leaning upon diagnosis and prescription, but there was one infallible road to certainty. He drank copiously at all the springs. Then he went back to the hotel for breakfast, but breakfast did not appeal to him. At ten o'clock Miss Carewe sent for a

doctor and the party spent three days in Homburg waiting until the victim of over-zealousness should be well enough to travel.

That episode gave Germany her coup de grâce.

The travellers fled across the border into Switzerland, but Switzerland swarmed with tourists. Short of climbing the Dent de Midi and roosting on top of it, there was no way of escaping the horde. There were difficulties about rooms, about carriages, about meals. No ruins for the archæologist, no zoos for the lover of camels and pelicans, no picturesque soldiers, no stirring ballads, no romantic history!

"Nothing but nature!" groaned Amelia. "I don't mind nature if I'm doing something interesting in it, but I'm not crazy about plain mountains."

Belinda apologized for the plainness of the Jungfrau and Mt. Blanc.

She loved Switzerland herself, but not in the company of the blind; and when she had soothed, and amused and propitiated until her patience was in tatters and her nerves worn to fiddle-strings, she would turn her back upon duty and wander off alone to invite her soul. Even if her soul tarried she was seldom left alone. Courtney had a surprising way of meeting her whenever she turned a corner and after a time or two, she resigned herself to the encounters. She even learned to look forward to the corners. It was reassuring to find that there was

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actually a man who could get up to see the miracle of a mountain dawn, who loved flower-strewn mountain meadows and could be silent while the sun dropped behind peaks of rose and gold, and purple twilight crept up from green valleys to eternal snows.

Courtney himself was surprised to find how much emotion he could crowd into an hour of communion with Nature and Belinda. In just what proportions the two contributed to the rapture and the dream, he did not attempt to decide, but he had a sneaking suspicion that he might find broad noonday in Hoboken an emotional experience if Belinda were by his side and that solar phenomena and Swiss scenery were in line with gilding refined gold and painting the lily.

It was to Interlaken that the letter came, turning Miss Barnes's schedule topsy turvy and transforming the resignation with which a majority of the personally conducted had been facing a tour through Northern Italy, to enthusiasm over *la belle France*.

Lord Bantholme wrote that he had escaped from the jaws of death and considered the occasion one for rejoicing and celebration, but that nine was in his opinion the ideal number for a celebrating party, and since he providentially knew a pilgrim band numbering eight, he intended to join it forthwith, if not sooner.

But — and here Belinda to whom the letter was addressed and who was reading snatches from it aloud

at the breakfast table, opened wide eyes and read on silently with a pucker between her brows, while the others waited with varying degrees of curiosity. When she looked up, she met seven pairs of eyes and smiled doubtfully.

"He has a plan," she began.

"He always has heavenly plans," interpolated Amelia.

"Well, I don't know that you'll like this one. I'm quite sure some of you wouldn't. I think we won't consider it."

Murmurs of protest rose from the two girls.

Belinda looked at Mr. Perkins. The discontented expression which had hovered over his face for the past few weeks had relaxed into something approaching genial interest.

"A very superior young man," he pronounced blandly. "Let us hear what he suggests, Miss Carewe."

Belinda took up the reading where she had left off.

"But," Lord Bantholme had written, "why, oh why, dear lady, are you obsessed with a desire for Italy, in August? The Italian lakes wouldn't be so bad, although they are hot and slow — mortally slow; but Venice, Florence, Pisa! Italian railway carriages, heat, fleas, smells! Don't. Don't. The leaning Tower isn't worth it.

"They say the weather down there is even more beastly

hot than usual this year. We're over-warm even in England.

"Now there's just one way to keep cool. That's to motor. It has gondola riding looking torrid.

"And motoring in France is the real thing.

"Here's what I want you all to do. Come and help me celebrate. Give up your bally old Titians and Giotto's and Baptisterys and come motoring with me down along the Loire and up through Brittany. I'll meet you at Orleans next week and I'll promise to have you in Paris on schedule time. You'll be my guests for the trip, and if I don't give you a good time I'll drink my own petrol.

"Now don't say 'Impossible.' Think it over. The château country is the original motor paradise. It's full up with ruins and romance and good food. If Mrs. Bagby needs a camel to make her happy, I'll take one along. Brittany will be cool and just mention the men-hirs of Carnac to Mr. Perkins, will you? He'll know that archæologists come from the ends of the earth to see them. Telegraph me when you can reach Orleans. Don't disappoint me. The doctor tells me I'm not strong enough to survive a relapse."

Belinda finished the letter, folded it, and put it in her pocket.

"Of course, you wouldn't want to miss Italy," she said. "But it is very friendly of him."

A chorus of comment drowned her voice.

Everybody was talking at once save Laura May, and she was looking volumes.

From the babel, the astonished conductor of the party managed to glean an occasional stray and illuminating phrase. Mrs. Nicholson was unalterably opposed to fleas. Miss Perkins had suffered enough from heat. She had been led to believe that Europe was cool. Mrs. Bagby had seen her last St. Sebastian. Picture galleries should know her no more. Mr. Perkins felt that short of Rome, which was an impossibility in summer, Italy had nothing old enough to offer him, and was convinced that Venice must be malarial. Courtney sang the praises of the table in Touraine.

Amelia announced vehemently that nothing but the smell of gasoline could reconcile her to Nature.

"You'd all like to accept the invitation?"

Miss Carewe's tone was incredulous. In her heart she felt that the thing was too good to be true; but if the good fortune did materialize it must be the travellers themselves who decreed the change of plans.

They voted for the motor trip as one man, and Belinda telegraphed to Lord Bantholme:

"Every one delighted. Orleans Wednesday at six."

Fortified by lively anticipation the party accepted Chamonix and Geneva with tolerant approval.

"Switzerland isn't so bad, when you are going away from it," Amelia admitted.



The château country is the original motor Paradise

"I'll miss the honey for breakfast and if anybody wanted to climb mountains, I suppose it would really be a lovely place."

The travellers arrived in Orleans hot, tired, dusty, but amiable. After one has reached a certain stage in sight-seeing there is something distinctly exhilarating about leaving undone the things one ought to have done; and running away from the Uffizi and Pitti galleries together had brought about among the members of the oddly assorted party an *esprit de corps* lacking before. No one could claim superiority. Each knew the other's guilty secret. They had dodged 156 pages of sights, mostly starred, and they were shamelessly glad of it.

"We don't really have to see the châteaux, do we?" Amelia asked as the Earl tucked her into one of the cars.

"Give me the word and I'll go by them all so fast you won't see anything but gray streaks," Lord Bantholme assured her.

"Oh, if we don't *have* to see them I don't mind looking at them. Mrs. Bagby got a book about them in Geneva and Laura May read some of it. She says they sound rather good — murders and duels and dungeons and love affairs and all that sort of thing. She thinks a lot of the most interesting part isn't very proper, though."

Laura May blushed.

"But then French history isn't proper. You know it

isn't, Miss Carewe. You couldn't even teach it so it was proper without leaving out so much of it that it didn't make sense at all. Don't you remember Mary Voght's mother was perfectly horrified because Mary came home and talked about Diane de Poitiers? She said Diane was a very improper person and she didn't send her daughter to a first-class private school at \$1,500 a year to have her mind corrupted."

It was Belinda's turn to blush now.

"But, my dear, " she began.

"Oh, you did leave out every single bit of the interesting parts, but there she was, right in the history book, and of course we all went and looked her up in the library. Whenever you skipped anybody in French history we knew it would be worth while looking her up."

"I'm afraid you'll have to meet the fair Diane again," said Lord Bantholme. "She rather permeates Blois and Chenonceaux."

"Oh, well, " Amelia had the reckless air of one who tosses his cap over the windmill. "History's different anyway. Everybody's been dead so long that things aren't scandal any more and you don't bother about the people's morals. You know you can't join a woman's club and do anything about them, so what's the use of feeling responsible?"

A night's rest, a morning's glimpse of Orleans, and then the open road — the wonderful road, poplar-fringed,

river-bordered, rolling itself up like a straight white ribbon before the flying car.

"No speed limit, no bad bits, no police traps," chortled Lord Bantholme. His goggled face with its broad, spreading smile was that of an ecstatic demon.

"But we won't see anything," gasped Laura May, holding on her hat with both hands.

"I'll drive more slowly after this, but I've got to let myself out some way this morning or explode. I'm overcharged. I can feel the happiness sizzling. And then I want to get to Blois. I'm going to tell you something in Blois — and ask you something."

She made no more protests against the speed.

That evening on the hotel balcony, he told her — and asked her. It was the chaperon herself who had lured the rest of the party out for an after-dinner walk and left the two there alone with the starlight and the river and the climbing roses, and, when Mr. Perkins firmly refused to walk any longer, it was the chaperon who went to the long French window opening on the balcony and called once, twice, three times before any one heard her.

Then Laura May answered, and as Belinda stepped out into the rose-scented gloom, the girl came to meet her, with Bantholme close behind.

"It's all right, Miss Carewe," the man said happily, but the girl said never a word. She only put her arms around Belinda and cried a little for sheer heartfulness

and then laughed a little because she had cried and looked up at Bantholme with such wet eyes and such smiling lips that he ignored the chaperon's presence and kissed both the eyes and lips. Not content with that he kissed the chaperon, who utterly failed to resent the performance.

When a twenty-four-year old lover has just proposed and been accepted on a rose-trellised balcony in Touraine sanity is not expected of him.

"Of course, it's all very well for you," Amelia said to the happy man later in the evening, "but being in love certainly does spoil a girl for a chum. Laura May's been no fun at all since we left England. She's simply mooned about without you and I suppose now she'll moon worse than ever with you, but I must say I don't blame her."

"Thank you," said the Earl humbly.

The château was quite wasted upon the lovers. They viewed the cabinet in which the Duc de Guise made his plucky, hopeless fight against his assassins, the high window from which Marie de Medici scrambled down a rope ladder to freedom and the room in which the infamous Catherine de Medici drew her last poisonous breath, all with the same beaming and blissful smiles, and they listened to the gloomy, dramatic tales of the guide as though he had been repeating rondeaux and villanelles.

What were "old, unhappy, far-off things" to them?

What place had murder and poison and intrigue in their new heaven and new earth? If the guide had dealt in love stories, perhaps they might have lent an ear, but the love stories of Blois have faded while the tragedies endure; and, though gay beauties and brave gallants have sighed and vowed in every gloomy room and corridor of the famous old château, the memory of their loves has been washed out with blood. Perhaps it is just as well for the American Young Person on tour that things are as they are. They were frail as they were fair, those flowers of old France, and the echoes of their amours would doubtless be less instructive and edifying than the stories of battle, murder, and sudden death.

But if Laura May and her lover waded through seas of gore unmoved, Amelia's thrills restored an average. She revelled in horrors and made copious notes of things to "look up."

"Give me French history!" she announced with fervour as the party waited in the little garden where they were to lunch. "There was always something doing in France. I'd hate to live in a country where nothing had ever happened except William Tell."

"Things certainly did happen, over there." Belinda was looking dreamily out between the acacias to where the great fortress climbed upward from its ancient moat and her eyes were seeing ghosts of dead ladies gone with

“the snows of yesteryear” — broken-hearted Madame Valentine, gentle Claude of France, fat-cheeked, evil-eyed Catherine, la Reine Margot with her pale face and midnight hair, soft-hearted Louise de la Vallière and laughing Aure de Montalais. All the intriguing, light, loving beauties of the Florentine’s famous “flying squadron” leaned from the little balconies of the wonderful spiral stairway, fluttered along the terraces, peered from the narrow windows; and she recognized each one, though it would have been hard for her to tell where her history ended and her Dumas began.

“If we could invite d’Artagnan over to luncheon,” Courtney said suddenly, his thought rhyming with hers. “And the Montalais, perhaps, but not la Vallière. She would weep and faint.”

“Dear dead women — with such hair, too,
Used to fall and brush their bosoms,”

Belinda quoted softly, but Amelia caught the words.

“Well, if *you’re* going to be sentimental too,” she began in accents of profound disgust; but at that moment a rosy-cheeked, white-aproned boy sat the *hors d’oeuvres* on the table, and she forgot her grievance.

That was a luncheon calculated to set one at peace with all the world.

Courtney had ordered it in honour of the engagement, announced the night before, and had led the way up the

narrow, mounting streets of the marvellous old town to a little inn, perched high on the hillside among thick clustering trees.

"It's astonishing how you find your way around, Mr. Courtney," Mr. Perkins said as they climbed a flight of steps cut in the rock and came out at the side gate of the inn garden, a quiet, sun-warmed, flower-sweet nook, overlooking the tumbled picturesque town and the gleaming river beyond.

"Oh, I've been here before," Courtney admitted. What was the use denying it when François was sure to greet him with respectful camaraderie and Madame would probably call him "*mon enfant?*"

Belinda looked at him with reflective eyes. He had evidently covered much ground and accumulated a surprising amount of experience in that one brief business trip. They had yet to reach a place with which he was not on terms of intimacy.

François' greeting was a heart-warming thing. He had put on a long gray frock coat over his white duck trousers to do his guests honour, indicating the festive nature of the occasion by a flaring, bright red tie, and sympathy with young love oozed from him at the pores. His face shone, his voice caressed. He walked jauntily, recalling the day when he, too, had been an accepted lover.

"I had but twenty years, Monsieur," he explained to

Lord Bantholme, "and it was necessary that one should wait, but she waited well, my little Marie. She is of a character, of a firmness. But you must see her."

"Ohé! Marie!" he called; and Madame came out through a door beyond which one caught gleams of shining copper and saw the scurrying figure of the white-aproned boy.

She, too, was smiling, but with a calmness in contrast with her husband's exuberance, and she came without haste, serene, dignified, well-poised, a hint of pride in her handsome, clear-cut face.

Typical Tourangelle from head to foot, from snowy, embroidered cap to square-toed shoe was Madame Marie. Town parodies of Paris modes had passed her by, left her unspoiled.

"See you, *ma mie*, it is M'sieu Courtney and the so happy fiancés," François announced.

She welcomed Courtney in French and the kindness in her eyes glowed more warmly as she looked at Laura May's pretty, blushing face.

"It is a great honour our little garden comes to receive, Mademoiselle," she said in careful, slow-spoken English, "with the flowers and the sunshine and the songs of the birds it has now the happy lovers. It is then a Paradise complete, this garden of ours."

"But it was not necessary that the lovers should have youth, *ma mie*," François' tone was reproachful. "Already

I had found that for me it had the air of Paradise, this garden."

She eyed him tolerantly.

"He is Parisian, my François," she explained to the company by way of tranquil apology for his burst of sentiment.

"And you, Madame?" asked Mrs. Bagby.

"*Moi, je suis Tourangelle!*" Mere English could not express the pride of it.

"Yes, Madame, I am of the country, of the soil — born upon the land of my father. It is so with us, *nous autres Tourangelles*. In Touraine each owns the farm on which he lives and from which he feeds his family. Oh, it need not be large — an acre, two acres — what the good Lord has given — and the good man has worked for, *bien entendu*, but, it is of the family. It is for that that in Touraine the peasant walks with the head high and the shoulders straight. Where one owns the land, there is pride, see you; and where the land gives freely as in Touraine, there is also the comfort.

"With economies, the sous mount until there is a *dot* for the daughter and one leaves something behind when the candles are lighted at one's head and feet."

"But you live in the town?" Mrs. Bagby had loosened her bonnet strings and seated herself comfortably beside Madame Marie on a garden bench. She was not haunted by dead queens, but here was something she could understand. There was a woman after her own heart, a woman

who knew the secrets of French country life and who, providentially, could speak English.

Madame Marie shrugged her shoulders, looked down over the town with a disdainful curl of the lip and then allowed her eyes to wander to her gallant husband.

"As Madame sees. Yes. When one marries, one departs perhaps from the ways of one's own. My husband has come to Touraine, a boy, but before, he had made the voyages. That changes all, the voyage. Impossible to be content even in the household of M'sieu le Comte, at Tours, where he has become chef. He has gone to Paris, to London. To cook a chicken seems to him better than to raise it for market. Me, I am of altogether another advice on this subject of the chicken — but what will you? One has the heart touched, one says adieu to the home, one follows into the world. *Grâce à Dieu*, it is not far to follow for me. One makes money in cooking the chickens for Englishmen, it appears. François is returned with a round sum. We marry. We buy this little place. It's not much but, one does not sleep under the roof of another and one gains always. Even in Paris one knows of the chickens of François; and the world comes from England; from America. We had once a young M'sieu of New York, an artist. He has come for a luncheon and he has rested with us for a year. It is from him that I have learned the English. Poor garçon, he had nothing else with which to pay — but since

then he has sent the money also — and the friends. It was through him that M'sieu Courtney is first come to us."

"You wear a most beautiful cap." Mrs. Bagby eyed the snowy linen covetously.

Madame Marie laughed.

"Oh, me, as I have said, I am of the soil. There are those in Touraine now, who buy in the towns the things absurd that one makes in Paris for the head — but for me, I wear always the *costume du pays*."

It was just here that the boy with the *hors d'oeuvres* created a diversion and checked Amelia's plaint. He checked, too, the torrent of questions hovering on Mrs Bagby's lips. Here was a chance to learn how one cultivated the vineyards that garlanded all the sun-soaked valley of the Loire, to find out why the peaches and plums were so big and so cheap, to inquire how the poultry, down in the busy market place, by the river, was fattened to such amazing size — but all that could wait. Mrs. Bagby, like Amelia, was hungry.

François disappeared into the copper-hung kitchen, where he straightway began to perform miracles, appearing at intervals to hover about the table and see for himself whether his efforts were being properly appreciated. He had taken off his frock coat now, and was in apron and cap, but his smile and his jauntiness were unimpaired, and as he watched the prowess of the nine at table, he radiated satisfaction.

"M'sieu has always the appetite," he said benevolently, as he served Lord Bantholme with more *langouste*. "It is of an absurdity that idea that a lover does not eat. Who should have the good appetite if not he? If the loved one is unkind — I do not say then — though still one might console oneself for much with my *langouste*, so it seems; but if all goes well, I find that then one has the stomach enlarged as is the heart."

He was back again with the artichokes.

"A *specialité de la maison*," he announced, rubbing his hands together and beaming anticipation. "You go to enjoy this, I am sure. You have heard of the great M'sieu Dumas?"

He was speaking at Belinda and she admitted that she had heard of Dumas.

"He has written the novels superb, is it not? You have read of our château here, in the Vicomte de Bragelonne? Down there, at the left — the red roof, see you, behind the tower, it is there that the unhappy Charles of England lodged. Me, I hold greatly to the novels of M'sieu Dumas. But you have perhaps not read his cook book?"

Belinda confessed that she had not.

"Ah, *there* is a truly great work. He was a cook by the Grace of God, that brave man — an amateur, but an amateur inspired. These artichokes are after a recipe of his. I have made a *succes fou* with them in London."

"You cooked in London!"

"But yes, Mademoiselle, at Claridge's. One gained well there, but what will you! England — it is always a triste exile. Pardon, Milord. I would say it is ^{lad} exile for the Frenchman. And then Marie waited here, and I remembered always the vineyards and the gardens and the sunshine and the river. Touraine rests in the heart, see you, Mademoiselle. To be one's own master is good, to own one's little inn, to sit in one's garden and watch the river, to be *chez soi* — at home — that goes well when one grows gray. It is a good life here on the hillside, Mademoiselle.

"*Personne* wishes more of the artichokes? I fly to bring the chicken."

When luncheon ended the guests lingered.

"You can leave me right here," Belinda said with decision. "I've chosen the better part. I shall sit in this garden with François and Madame and eat artichokes until my life ebbs. There can't be anything better. Why move on?"

"But if we are going to Amboise this afternoon?" Lord Bantholme remonstrated.

"Go, my child. Go. As for me, I remain."

But, after an hour under the acacia trees, she allowed herself to be persuaded and the travellers went their way down the steep street, turning often to look back to where François waved a friendly hand and Madame Marie stood smiling a serene farewell.

"If one could only buy the dear things!" sighed Belinda.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A RENDEZVOUS IN TOURAINE

"TRAVELLING backward is very confusing," said Amelia.

Lord Bantholme's party had retreated from the hot dining room of the hotel at Tours and were having after-dinner coffee among the palms of the pebble-paved court.

"Who's travelling backward?" the Earl asked absent-mindedly, his attention centered on the red rose which Laura May had tucked among her black locks. He had given her that rose. Queer how different a fellow felt about roses when he was in love. He had sent tons of the things in his time, without getting stirred up over anything about them except the bill.

"Why *we* are," Amelia explained. "Of course you wouldn't be expected to notice it. You and Laura May wouldn't wake up if you were travelling in figure eights, but this going backward upsets my impressions frightfully. Now there's the Duc de Guise. I thought he was splendid at Blois and I was furious with the men who murdered him; and then I went to Amboise to-day and found out how he had all those poor Huguenots stabbed

and hung and beheaded, and I decided that plain murdering was much too good for him. I'm glad they stabbed him as many times as they did."

"It wasn't the same Guise, you know," protested Mr. Perkins, but Amelia airily waved aside historic fact.

"Oh, well, they were all pretty much of a muchness, and that Amboise one ought to have been stabbed."

"He was brave," objected Courtney.

"Well, what if he was? Weren't the Huguenots brave too? I could just see them going up the scaffold, one after another, singing their Huguenot hymn as long as there was a single man left to sing it. I'd have cried over them — if my nose hadn't been so sunburned I didn't dare."

"It always appealed to my imagination, too — that dwindling volume of song and then, at last, the silence," Belinda said with a shadow in her eyes.

"Yes, and that scar-faced Guise gloating over it and going off to order more Huguenots hacked to pieces and hung from his dining-room window-bars while he was at breakfast. Stabbing that man would have been simply pampering him. He and Catherine de Medici ought to have been tied together and dropped into boiling oil."

"Oh, Amelia!" Laura May in her present mood felt friendly even toward historic criminals.

"Well, didn't they deserve it? Think of Catherine

making poor little Mary Stuart and Francis go out on the balcony to watch the executions. Don't you know how they loathed it? They weren't as old as I am."

"And they had been so gay and happy when they rode into Amboise for their wedding fêtes just a little while before!" said Mrs. Nicholson. Her soft heart was being sadly harrowed by the tragedies of Touraine.

"Yes, that wedding-bells idea was what sent Laura May and Lord Bantholme into a trance." Amelia spoke with fine scorn. "The guide happened to say something about the young bride and the boy king and all their bridal procession riding in through the first big gate, and those two silly things, over there, went off and sat down on a bench in the moat to think about lovers and weddings and never did see any more of the château."

"So much the better for us."

The Earl was unashamed.

"It gave all of you the horrors, didn't it?"

"Of course. That's what we went for. Everybody loves horrors. I don't get feelings as easily as I did at first, though." There was deep regret in Amelia's voice.

"Why, that first week in London, I could get worked up over almost anything, but now I've got to have something awfully tragic. You do get used to blood stains and places where gallows stood and rivers that ran red with blood and all that sort of thing, in Europe. I suppose that was the way with Mary Stuart. She got so

used to seeing men killed off in swarms here in France that you can't wonder she didn't think much of blowing up one poor excuse for a man like Darnley. Probably she couldn't understand at all why John Knox and the other Scots fussed about such little things. I never did like John Knox myself. I wish he'd had Catherine de Medici to deal with instead of her daughter-in-law. He wouldn't have lasted two days. Didn't poor Mary strike the everlasting limit in mothers-in-law? You know she's backward, too — Mary, I mean. When we got acquainted with her in Edinburgh she was making things hum so herself that it's confusing to come down here and find her young and timid and bullied."

Amelia was chattering even more breathlessly and inconsequently than usual. She seemed excited and restless and her eyes wandered constantly toward the doorway through which one could see figures moving to and fro in the brightly lighted office.

Suddenly she stopped talking and became absorbed in the motto which decorated the coffee pot.

Two men in motor coats and caps had entered the circle of light and stopped to talk with the commissionaire.

"It is the recipe for coffee which Maître François Rabelais made, Mademoiselle," explained the waiter, observing the intense interest with which Amelia was studying the inscription on the swelling side of the pot.

The two motorists came out into the court and chose a table. As they took off their caps and dust coats, a chorus of recognition sounded from Belinda, Laura May and Mrs. Bagby, who sat facing the new comers. Amelia, apparently memorizing the recipe of Maître Rabelais, looked up only when she heard the three voices exclaiming,

“Count de Brissac!”

“Why, so it is,” she agreed with pleased surprise.

The Count, too, was obviously surprised. As his name echoed on the air, he looked about him in amazement, which changed to evident delight when his glance reached the little tables where the Earl’s party was seated.

“Ah!”

The exclamation was rich in flattery; and, before it died away, he had precipitated himself across the court and was shaking hands all around, with indiscriminating fervour.

“But you are not then in Italy?”

“Evidently not, since you find us here,” Belinda admitted laughingly.

“And I who pictured you in Venice, riding in gondolas, eating ices on the piazza, listening to Santa Lucia!”

“We abandoned our plans when Lord Bantholme invited us to motor through Touraine and Brittany.”

“But I, too, follow the road along the Loire and into Bretagne. It seems that my lucky star rides high

in heaven. Only day before yesterday, I bored myself in Trouville when a friend arrived with his car — Monsieur de Fontanges, a connection of my family. He had urgent affairs at his château in Touraine and begged me to go with him. It was a diversion and I love Touraine; so I have come, we have regulated the affairs — the business as you call it — and now we follow our whims. Is it permitted that I present my friend?"

Monsieur de Fontanges was duly presented. He was a small, lean, well-preserved Frenchman, with scanty hair brushed carefully forward over the bald top of his head, shrewd black eyes gleaming behind his nose-glasses and a superb manner tempered by genial affability.

He was charmed, enchanted. Count de Brissac had spoken often of his American friends. He had hoped to make their acquaintance later, in Paris; and, now, good fortune had run to meet him.

"What a happy chance that the necessity of consulting an avocat brought us this evening to Tours!" he exclaimed turning to De Brissac.

"And now that you find your friends, I shall send the car to the garage. We will spend the night in the hotel, and, perhaps, in the morning, we might make a little party for Chenonceaux or Loches. Yes?"

He beamed inquiringly upon the listening group. Belinda turned toward Lord Bantholme.

"You are the Personal Conductor now, you know."

He was not, like Monsieur de Fontanges, charmed or enchanted but he was willing. In his state of comprehensive satisfaction with the world, he was inclined to give even De Brissac the benefit of any stray doubt. The man didn't seem to be such a bad sort, and Laura May had assured him that the Frenchman was in love with Miss Carewe. Poor duffer! He hadn't a ghost of a show, with Courtney in the field. His heart warmed to the unfortunate one. Even if a fellow had gone a bit crooked, it was deucedly hard luck to be hopelessly in love with the wrong girl.

So he endorsed the plan for the morrow.

"You have not yet been to Chenonceaux?" Monsieur de Fontanges asked. "No? I am glad. It is beautiful — Chenonceaux — and gay. They are all beautiful, these châteaux of Touraine, but not too gay."

"They're giving me green and yellow melancholy," Belinda acknowledged, "but I like it. There's such a fine, full flavour of romance about even the grewsome things."

"Yes, and at Chenonceaux, see you, it is all romance. Diane held her court of Venus there and all the world loved and danced and sang and made merry. The place has always that air. One finds laughter and kisses echoing in the air. At Loches there are only curses and groans."

"Me for Chenonceaux!" Lord Bantholme voted with emphasis.

It was later in the evening that Monsieur de Fontanges proposed an additional plan for the next day.

"Mon cher," he said, laying his hand on Count de Brissac's arm, "if you could but persuade your friends to accept our hospitality at Monrepos! I am perhaps too new an acquaintance to presume, but if I might be allowed to offer luncheon ——"

The Count seized upon the suggestion eagerly.

"An excellent idea! The château is but a little way beyond Chenonceaux."

"A small place," interrupted his friend modestly. "But in France we call these little boxes also châteaux."

"It is charming, your Monrepos," protested the Count. "A little gem, Mesdames. You will like it I am sure. We could lunch there more comfortably than at the inn."

"My family is not in residence, and there is not an establishment. You will have much to pardon, but the visit would so honour me, and it may amuse you to see how one lives to-day on the small estates of Touraine."

"And he has an angel in the kitchen, this fortunate man," De Brissac supplemented. "Also a butler who produces comforts as a juggler brings white rabbits from a hat."

The picture was alluring and the visit to Monrepos was added to the programme.

Then there was a movement toward bed, an exchange

of good nights. Amelia, dropping behind the rest of the party, found Count de Brissac beside her.

“Always a heart of gold!” he said softly. “I would have been in Venice now, if your message had not come to tell me that your plans were changed. I could wait no longer. My tickets were bought — but it is simpler, this matter of Touraine, and has all the air of chance. You found my letter here?”

She nodded. In the weeks that had passed since she had said good-bye to him in London, she had slipped slightly from under the spell of his eyes, his voice, had been able to think of him without a fluttering heart and a choking throat; but now that he was with her, the old feeling came back with a rush and she did not dare trust herself to speak.

“You have missed me a little! Yes?”

Women older and more worldly wise than Amelia had felt their defenses weakening when he spoke to them in that tone, looked at them as he was looking at her, and the susceptible little schoolgirl’s heart melted like wax within her.

This was the lover she had always dreamed of, when she laid her novel aside and gave herself up to dreams, a lover handsome, tall and noble, a lover with eloquent dark eyes and a caressing voice and the general air of a Ouida hero. She had been afraid there were no such radiant beings outside the books. The frank, foolish

undergraduates who had showered her with violets and chocolates had always fallen miserably short of fiction standards; but here, at last, was her ideal.

"Tell me, *cherie*. You have thought of me sometimes? You are a little glad that I have come?"

She looked up at him without a word, but the look told him all that was necessary for him to know, and he went upstairs with a satisfied smile on his lips.

"They're in your pocket, *mon ami*, those American dollars," said De Fontanges when he and the Count had found their rooms and closed the door behind them.

"Already I am spending the twenty-five thousand francs that you owe me and will repay. Am I not a friend to cherish, with my sudden inspirations about parties for Chenonceaux and luncheons at Monrepos?"

He seated himself on the edge of his bed and loosened his high collar.

"Ah, that is better. It is hot, this dear Touraine, and we were so cool in Normandy. I would not have believed that I would leave Trouville, would miss the *grande semaine* there; but you received your letter from the little one, and immediately I had affairs in Touraine. Peste! I hope that they are always at the service of my relatives — those affairs of mine. And then there were twenty-five thousand francs."

"You shall have them."

"Oh, I do not hurry, I do not insist; but I admit that

it has also a personal interest for me, your sport of heiress chasing. I am not all altruism. I do not claim such loftiness of soul — but I find it delightful, this game. Would one say that we had so carefully planned the rencontre, the party, the luncheon? It had all the air of an impromptu, *n'est ce pas?*”

He laughed — he had always found life amusing, this elderly man, who had never allowed his conscience to trouble his head or his heart, who had much wit and no smallest trace of a scruple in his composition.

“She is pretty, your heiress,” he went on encouragingly, “and foolish. The affair should be of a perfect simplicity. As for me, my heart is shattered by Miss Carewe and I shall be a thorn in the side of the disapproving Monsieur Courtney. He does not receive us with open arms, that young man.”

De Brissac had lost his look of satisfaction. He was lying back in a *chaise longue* and staring gloomily at the ceiling. His friend studied him for a few moments in perplexity.

“What have you, *mon garçon*? I do not find that the fresco merits admiration and yet it is not so bad that one must scowl at it.”

The Count growled an inarticulate response.

“What is it that does not go to your liking? The game is perhaps too easy? You feel your heavy ammunition wasted upon it? Have patience for a little while.

Allow yourself to be bored tranquilly until you have made your coup. Afterward, there are diversions."

His cynical old face smiled cheerfully, but De Brissac chewed his mustache in silence.

"For six sous I would give up the plan," he said at last.

"And your debts!" De Fontanges asked quietly.

The Count arose and walked to the window.

"One doesn't relish being a blackguard," he said with profound disgust in his voice. "After all, one is a De Brissac."

"You think of the family late in the day, *mon cher*. And marrying for money is perhaps not so hard upon a name as the things that will happen if you do not find money. We love for *beaux yeux*—but we marry for a *dot*. It is arranged like that and you are but a part of the system. Why complain? There is perhaps another fair one somewhere? But sentiment is at times too expensive. When one has danced, one pays the piper. And, having renewed credit, one dances again. I have heard that it is gay, this dancing to the tune of millions."

As Monsieur de Fontanges had promised, Chenonceaux was free from tragic ghosts. The guide allowed the party to wander where they would. It was against the rules, she explained, but M'sieu was a neighbour, an old friend, and there were no other strangers for the moment. M'sieu himself could show all that there was to see.

She was quite right. Monsieur de Fontanges proved a cicerone of parts, knowing every foot of his ground, ready with fact and fable, history and gossip, peopling the wonderful Italian gardens that were Diane's pride with all the beauties and gallants who had walked there, setting a lovely face in each window of the wing by which Catherine made the château bridge the river Cher.

He was so entertaining, so delightful, that Belinda gladly granted him a place beside her, listened, laughed, jested with him, translated his stories for Mrs. Bagby and the Perkinses wherever his English failed him and he lapsed into rapid French.

It was impossible to be dull for a moment in his company. He had read his companions with unerring eye, and had something in his raconteur's budget to suit each taste.

So well amused was the whole party that no one noticed when Amelia and Count de Brissac fell behind, lingering first in the sunlit garden and then wandering beyond the bright parterres into the forest where the narrow *allées* of Diane's laybrinth cut their cool shadowy way through a world of misty silver beeches and sturdy oaks and firs. It was made for lovers, that labyrinth, and Amelia listened as readily as any fair lady who had ever paced the woodland paths. Perhaps she blushed even more readily than any of those dead and gone belles. Blushes were at a premium in Venus's Court.

And if the Count was not the most earnest lover whom the forest glamour had aided and abetted, he was quite impressive enough to satisfy a pretty novel-fed sentimentalist whose foolish head was no protection to a still more foolish heart.

"Papa will never allow me to marry a foreigner," she prophesied dismally, in a lucid interval between raptures.

"If he objects, we will do without his consent."

She looked frightened, but the man's hand closed softly over hers, his face was very near her own.

"But that is in the future. Now, we have only to be happy," he said in his wooing, persuasive voice.

"For the rest — we shall see. It will all come right if you love me — and you do love me, Mignonne?"

Poor Amelia! That "Mignonne" thrilled her through and through, added the last touch of poetry to her romance. A Spartaville lover would have called her "Honey," but she had mercifully been lifted to higher planes of sentiment and she was grateful for her blessings.

"You do love me?" he asked again.

She was ready to vow that she loved as never maid had loved before, but she could not remember what any of her favourite heroines had said when they made such vows, so she contented herself with a whispered "Yes."

"Little angel!" murmured the Count.

"But no one must know it — this dear love of ours," he added. "Miss Carewe would send me away, write

to your father, who knows what? She must not suspect or we are separated, *ma mie*, and that would be too hard."

"Don't you think I might tell Laura May? She'd be so interested," Amelia pleaded.

"She would tell her fiancé, he would tell his friend Courtney. No; it is safer to confide in no one. "Tell me—this Monsieur Courtney, you are friends with him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then he can be useful, that excellent young man. Devote yourself to him, little one. If the others think that you and he are interested in each other, they will have no eyes for us. And I will pay my court to Miss Carewe, but you will understand always that I do it only to be near you."

Amelia looked doubtful.

"It isn't very honest," she said unhappily.

"But it harms no one. It is but love-strategy, *cherie*. If you would rather have me go away ——"

"Oh, no," she begged.

"Then amuse Mr. Courtney when it is possible. I shall envy him, but there will be the hours for us, and then, one day, there will be no one between us, no one to fear. We can wait a little while for so great a happiness."

"Yes," she sighed, "but it would be heavenly to tell everybody and have Mr. Courtney give us a luncheon and just go ahead like Laura May and Banty."

He kissed the drooping lips until they smiled again.

The truants joined their party just as Belinda was inquiring for them and Amelia plunged into feverish comment on the beauties of the château.

"But I'll never get the hedgehogs and the ermine and the salamanders straightened out," she said hopelessly, as though she had spent the last half-hour in wrestling with the royal beasts.

"I simply can't remember which animal goes with which king."

"*N'importe!*" said De Fontanges. "Of one thing you may always be sure, Mademoiselle. They all had their *bêtes noires*, those old kings.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BRITTANY DOES HER BEST FOR A LOVER BUT LAURA MAY BLOCKS THE GAME

MONREPOS was as restful as the promise in its name, a château to banish thought of ghost and guide book, a lighthearted, cheerful home for the living, on a gentle hill-slope above the river, with vineyards festooning the sunny slope beyond, and broad-spreading green trees shading the lawn, and a drowsy, sweet old garden rambling down almost to the water's edge. Mrs. Bagby broke in upon a chorus of appreciative praise.

"How much land have you?" she asked brusquely, the vivid interest which only farm matters could evoke lighting her eyes.

"Only a little, Madame," sighed De Fontanges. "The peasants now divide the land among themselves. We have not much for ourselves, we of the noblesse, but it is enough. If you would care to go over the place after luncheon I should be charmed." And he talked earnestly with her of drains and manures and pigs and poultry. He was versatile, this little man of the boulevardier air.

Luncheon was served on the terrace under awnings that flapped gently in the indolent summer breeze. "A *déjeûner du pays*," as Batiste, the butler, explained with smiling pride. Fish from the river, mushrooms from the field, birds from the forest, salad and vegetables from the garden, delicious, fragrant little wild berries picked by the roadside, *fromage à la crème* furnished by M'sieu's cows, wine from M'sieu's vineyards.

"And you ever have the heart to leave this place?" Belinda said to her host, as she ate her last berry and looked out across the valley to where the forest of Amboise slumbered in the noontide haze.

"There are also the boulevards and the Café Anglais, Mademoiselle. Amuse yourselves, my friends. The place is yours. Madame Bagby and I go to the barns."

Mr. Perkins, who had been composing himself for an after-luncheon nap in a low willow chair, sat up, as he heard the announcement, and looked about helplessly for his hat.

"I will go to the barns, too," he announced with firmness. Mrs. Bagby stared at him in surprise.

"Land sakes, what do you know about a barn?" she asked; but he ignored the question and stalked away beside her, listening with tightly pressed lips to Monsieur de Fontanges's fluent prattle.

"Behold the green-eyed monster."

De Brissac's voice was too low for any ears save Belinda's. She turned to him laughing.

"You must reason with your friend, Count. There are no capsules that will cure jealousy, and I must take my party safely home."

"Will you be allowed to take in, without duty, so many European-made romances? There, also, one sees the beginning of the end."

He nodded toward the other side of the terrace where Amelia and Courtney were sitting on the low parapet. Belinda looked at the two for a moment, then rose, turning her back upon them, and led the way down the broad, shallow steps into the garden.

Clouds of white butterflies hovered over the masses of purple heliotrope that bordered the path, creamy roses nodded at her as she passed, tall white lilies bowed and beckoned. The air was heavy with warmth and fragrance, but fanned, now and then, by little, fresh, vagrant breezes that scattered flower petals and set the long stems swaying. They played tricks with Belinda's hair too, those audacious breezes, blowing it low on her forehead, curling it round her ears, lifting loose strands up to catch the sunlight; and the Count watched enviously while they had their way with it — that golden brown hair that would be so soft to the touch, so silken-smooth to hands or lips.

The sun heat stole into his veins, and yet, that very

morning in another garden, it had not warmed his blood, even to moderate heat. He had prodded himself to love-words there; and, now, love-words were beating in his brain, knocking at his lips, clamouring to be spoken.

Belinda glanced back at him, across her shoulder.

"Is it cooler down by the water?" she asked.

"There is a boat," he answered eagerly. "We could follow the bank where the willows overhang the water and so keep in the shade."

She hesitated for a moment, looked toward the terrace and walked on down the path toward the river. Why not play, since every one, even Mrs. Bagby and Mr. Perkins, was busy with the game?

They talked of many things, as the boat stole along in the shade of the willows, but always the talk drifted back to love — old loves of hearts long dust, but no safe theme for a man and a maid. He told her love-stories of Touraine, stories gay and sad and pitiful and bad, but each one pleading the heart's cause; and, as her eyes grew dreamier and her lips sweeter, he quite forgot poor little Amelia and her millions, forgot his debts and close-pressing scandals, forgot everything except that he was in love at last, blindly, bewildering in love with a slip of a girl whose hair was gold where the sun touched it and whose face was an excuse for midsummer madness.

"Poor things!" she said, as he finished a tale of grim Plessis le Tours; "I wonder whether they loved more in

those old days or merely had more heroic chances to prove their love."

She was trailing one hand in the cool water by the boatside and watching the eddies round it, so she did not see the Count's eyes.

"They loved more frankly," he said, and the look in the eyes had become a throb in the voice. "Men said what they felt and women were not afraid to listen. I think the courage and the passion linger in the air here, even now. Would you listen to a lover who could offer you nothing worth having save love — foolish, reckless, mad love? Would you listen? — or would you be afraid to know?"

She looked up laughingly, ready to turn his question to a jest, but his face was white and his lips did not smile.

"Would you listen?" he asked again. The boat was drifting now. He leaned forward and caught her hands, carrying them to his lips.

"Don't," she said quickly. "Don't. You are spoiling everything. We were all so happy and you will make all the beautiful plans impossible — Brittany, Paris — everything. You mustn't make love to me. You have no right — I've given you no reason to think —"

She was breathless, stammering. Something in his eyes frightened her. The noonday hush seemed to have grown sultry, oppressive, storm portent.

"Don't," she said again, but this time in protest against

what his eyes were saying. "I don't love you. I can't listen. I would have to send you away."

He sat quite still for a moment, looking at her, and a shadow gathered in his face until it had blotted out the white passion there. Then he kissed the hands he held, kissed them slowly, deliberately, freed them, and took up his oars.

"As you say, I have no right," he agreed bitterly. "And it is only women who may spoil things without blame."

They left the boat moored at the little dock and went back to the château in silence.

"I am sorry," Belinda said gently as they climbed the terrace steps. She felt humble and guilty. A Personal Conductor, even when temporarily off duty, should have known better than to experiment with the Latin temperament, on a golden day, in an enchanted land.

In the cool of the afternoon, the three cars sped back to Tours along one of the loveliest roads in France, but only Monsieur de Fontanges was still talkative.

"Why so quiet, Miss Bowers?" asked Lord Bantholme, suddenly realizing that, though Amelia was in the tonneau, there was silence in the car.

"I'm too happy to talk," she said seriously. Laura May turned to look at her. Then she studied Courtney's face and assumed an expression of supernatural wisdom. Matchmaking becomes a mania with the girl who is happily engaged or happily married.

After that day at Chenonceaux and Monrepos, three motor cars went with Lord Bantholme's party instead of two. Monsieur de Fontanges contributed so much to the entertainment of the crowd that no one except Mr. Perkins looked askance at him, and Count de Brissac made himself vastly agreeable to every one except Courtney, with whom he failed in spite of conscientious effort.

"They're an addition," Mrs. Bagby said to Belinda in her positive way. "That frisky old gentleman livens things up a heap. I wouldn't trust him on the other side of a soda cracker you know; but it's real entertaining to be on the same side of the cracker with him."

Not a historic spot nor an opportunity for amusement did Monsieur de Fontanges allow his new friends to miss. They shuddered over Loches and Louis XI's victims. They rode up the hill to the château of Chinon in Jeanne d'Arc's train, and lunched with the Gargantuan spirit of Rabelais at the little hotel looking out over Chinon's busy market place. They gathered luscious fruit in orchards where the trees were loaded to breaking point, they picked wild berries to eat with roadside tea, they picnicked in dim forests through whose hearts the white roads cleaved their clean-cut way, they bought unpackable things of cajoling market vendors and patronized Punch and Judy shows at rustic fêtes.

And when, one blue and gold morning, the three cars took the road for Vannes, there was regret in their good-byes.

"Ten perfect days," said Belinda.

"Brittany will have to be kind if she is to console us for leaving Touraine."

Brittany *was* kind to them in her earnest, unsmiling way. At least she was kind to every one except Courtney and, as a matter of fact, he had considered himself aggrieved even during the last days in Touraine. Summed up neatly, his grievance was an overdose of Amelia. Wherever he went, he found her by his side. If she did not arrange the grouping herself, some one else did it for her. Count de Brissac, Monsieur de Fontanges, his Aunt Florilla, Laura May — all lent a helping hand. Lord Bantholme, moved by Courtney's protests, attempted to reason with Laura May; but she proved to him in five minutes that he ought not to interfere. With certain infallible accompaniments to feminine logic, she could have proved anything to that infatuated young nobleman in much less than five minutes.

"Don't be silly, dear," she advised, with that superior air which all women assume when explaining subtle affairs of the heart to mere men. "It would be the best thing in the world for him and it's sure to come out all right if he and Amelia are thrown together enough."

"But he's in love with Miss Carewe, I tell you."

"Nonsense. He hasn't a bit of chance with her. She can hardly stand him, and it's so foolish for a nice man like that to waste time loving in vain. He isn't a bit

that kind. Amelia's a dear and she's in love with him. Anybody can see that. She almost runs after him. And she'll have such a lot of money — he does like to spend money, you know. So I think if you're really a friend of his you'll consider his best interests and tell him what a darling Amelia is and how Miss Carewe dislikes him and what a good time he could have with piles of money."

He didn't exactly tell Courtney all that, but he took a neutral position and watched his friend's struggles without lending a helping hand. Women knew more about such things than men, he reasoned.

Only Mrs. Bagby understood and sympathized. As for Belinda, she was busy binding up wounds of her own making. She was kind to Count de Brissac in those Breton days — oh, angel-kind to him. There's nothing that will win a woman's sympathy like a hopeless passion which she herself has inspired, and the best of her sex will resort to nursing rather than surgery in such cases. She and Mrs. Bagby rode with Monsieur de Fontanges and the Count, as a rule; Mr. Perkins, his sister and Mrs. Nicholson were driven by Sykes; Courtney and Amelia sat behind the Earl and Laura May. If there was discontent with the arrangement, no sign of it appeared in the car of Monsieur de Fontanges. He was amusing himself prodigiously, this man of catholic tastes. His keen wit and worldly sophistry tilted gayly against Mrs. Bagby's native humour and shrewd common-sense. She

was a novelty, a type, and he had the intelligence to appreciate her, a curiosity to see what effect French gallantry might have upon her. Incidentally, he found Mr. Perkins's throes diverting.

Jealousy did not sit gracefully upon the erstwhile self-centred hypochondriac, but it stirred him to an energy which no capsules had inspired. The moment that the cars unloaded their freight, he appeared at Mrs. Bagby's right hand and there he stuck fast during the waking hours. He tramped miles, keeping pace with her sturdy stride, he cut short his study of the dolmens of Carnac to go to a fair at Auray, he passed by Romanesque ruins to visit ill-smelling sardine factories and investigate canning processes.

Those were strenuous days for an invalid, but he throve surprisingly on them. His cheeks plumped out, healthy brown and red replaced his sallow tints, his appetite increased, his step acquired a spring, a resourceful alertness elbowed aside the fretful dependence which had been his chronic attitude. And Mrs. Bagby watched him with a wise calculation in her eyes, though the bulk of her attention seemed usually to be given to the chatty little Frenchman, trotting cheerfully at her left.

"If Jonas could see her now," said Belinda to Mrs. Nicholson, who smiled response.

"Monsieur de Fontanges has charming manners," she admitted. "One cannot help liking him."

The gallant Frenchman at times had shown an appreciation of old porcelain femininity as well as of the farm-bred product, and even when a woman's heart is laid away in dried rose leaves and sweet lavender, she is not wholly insensible to subtle flattery.

Not until the party reached Pontaven was Courtney able to assert himself and exchange partners with Count de Brissac. Perhaps desperate hardihood worked the desired result and then again, a conversation which Monsieur de Fontanges had with his relative in the writing room of Madame Josephine's hotel may have had something to do with the situation.

"You are going far, *mon cher*," the older man remarked lightly but with a hint of warning in his tones. "There are proverbs about amusing oneself by playing with the fire, and then again I remember a most instructive little fable — was it by Monsieur Æsop or by our La Fontaine? At any rate it had to do with a dog who was carrying a bone across the waters. He attempted to secure, also, the reflection of the bone which he saw in the water. And, as I remember it, he arrived at the other side of the stream quite boneless, but with an appetite to make one shudder. Me, I have passion for bones — but a dislike for hunger."

De Brissac scowled at the fable, but took its moral to heart, and while the party rambled about the over-picturesque little town beloved of artists, he walked at Amelia's side, smiling, devoted, but casting occasional

glances toward Belinda and Courtney. They were gay, those two, full of absurdities and follies. Courtney could have told why his spirits were soaring like a toy balloon. He had no doubts whatever as to the cause; but Belinda, being a woman, was not frank, even with herself.

"The air is intoxicating here in Brittany," she said, by way of apology for her mood. "It makes me fey, after the warmth and languor of Touraine. And then this is such a dear foolish little town. It doesn't look true at all, you know. So many narrow streets and winding waterways, and picturesque mill wheels and adorable little bridges never got together in any natural way. The artists have painted the place and set it up, and it knows perfectly well that it's only a stage setting and not a real town."

"Here comes the chorus," added Courtney, looking down a side street where a crowd was pouring from a little gray church.

"The merry, merry villagers! Didn't I tell you this was a comic-opera town? What a delectable crowd!"

"I rather think it's a wedding."

"Oh, it is! It is. That particularly gorgeous girl must be the bride. They're going the other way. Let's follow them."

Belinda turned around excitedly.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"Around the next corner. They went on ahead." She looked at him with invitation in her face.

"Never mind them — come on," he urged, and away they hurried after the wedding party, winding and twisting about the inconsequent streets, until they caught up with the procession, as it turned into a little market place near the river.

A roof covered the stone-paved square. At one end a rude gallery ran across from side to side; and from it, presently, came a buzzing and humming and droning, gradually rising to shrillness and life.

"Bagpipes!" gasped Belinda. "I saw the heather and gorse to-day but I didn't expect bagpipes." The wedding party had scattered itself about the square, but as the music grew louder and more insistent, the younger men and women gravitated toward each other and chose partners. A moment later the bride and groom — she in full skirt and silk apron and snowy coif, he in plaited trousers and velvet coat — led off in a queer, trotting dance which grew faster and faster as the music skirled. No swaying rhythm, no languorous grace, but a dance testing legs and mind. Up and down and round the dancers went, over the rough stone paving, in and out, whirling and twirling, out of the market place and down the narrow streets, back again without ever a stop or a break. No pause for breath, but on, on, on, with red cheeks and shining eyes and smiling lips.

"Well, there's one giddy thing in this beautiful, serious land," said Belinda. "How *can* they keep it up? I'm out of breath just watching them."

"I could do it," boasted Courtney.

"Is that a dare?" she asked.

"If Madame and M'sieu would care to join in the gavotte ——" said a cheerful voice. A Breton woman, long-limbed, deep-bosomed, clear-eyed, her plaited skirt standing out like a shelf around her hips, her coif and fichu dazzling white in the sunshine, had come across the square to them and was speaking in halting French.

"It is my daughter who marries," she said with pride, "and if the Americans would like to dance ——"

The pipes insisted, the dancers trotted past, their sabots clicking like a multitude of castanets, the bride's mother smiled encouragement.

Courtney held out his hand.

Belinda waited a moment, her face aglow with kindling resolution. Then she tossed her hat aside, took the proffered hand and off they went, footing it bravely over the uneven stones, whirling and twirling with the best, following the bride and bridegroom in a mad dash down one street and up another, around an old mill and back to the market hall. There Belinda brought up, crimson-cheeked, gasping for breath. She leaned limply against a post, her hand still in Courtney's, her eyes meeting his merrily.

"I can no more. My shoes and my breathing apparatus were never made for it. I'm the product of an effete civilization — but wasn't it great?"

"Immense. Puts it all over any feeble little terpsichorean efforts I ever made before."

He had apparently forgotten that he was holding her hand; and, as they turned away, after an exchange of smiles with the bride's mother, they went like two children, hand in hand and laughing.

"Such a glorious, foolish morning!" Belinda said happily. "There really is something about this Breton air."

"There is," the man agreed with emphasis. "I didn't think I would like Brittany as I do. It's a heavenly country."

They met their friends when they turned the next corner, but they were walking soberly then, though the sound of pipes was still buzzing in their ears and the excitement of the gavotte still shining in their faces.

Oddly enough, neither the girl nor the man said a word about the wedding. The crowd would have wanted to go to the dance and that Breton gavotte belonged to them.

When the cars whizzed on to Quimper that afternoon, Belinda was sitting in the tonneau of Lord Bantholme's car with Courtney. She hardly knew how it had come about, but Courtney did. He had carried his point high-handedly, regardless of Amelia's wishes or of De

Brissac's plans, and he had found an unexpected ally in Monsieur de Fontanges, who had, in fact, taken the matter out of his hands, adjusted it with his usual suavity, bestowed Amelia in his own car, called the Count to a seat beside her, and disappeared in a cloud of dust, leaving Belinda and Courtney to inevitable companionship.

On the road to Douarnenez, the next day, things were again to Courtney's liking. He was radiantly content and Belinda seemed to have no quarrel with the Fates. The wild gavotte had broken down the wall of constraint that had risen between them since the friendly Swiss days. They had been foolish together; and, when two people can be unreservedly foolish together, they have gone far along the road to comradeship.

So Belinda smiled on Courtney and Courtney smiled on all the world. He considered Finistère the garden of Europe, and was surprised when Laura May and Lord Bantholme remarked upon the wildness and bleakness of the scenery after Quimper and its sheltered valley were left behind. Even wind-swept, wave-battered Pointe du Raz and the cruel, ill-omened Baie des Trépassés appealed to him as cheerful, pleasant spots and he sniffed up the sardine scents of Douarnenez, as though he were breathing spicy odors from Araby the blest.

When, late in the afternoon, Belinda went alone with him for a walk along the shore, his cup of joy was so full

that he carried it soberly, half afraid to laugh for fear of scattering the precious drops. A quiet happiness had succeeded to his festive mood and neither he nor Belinda talked much as they strolled along the sands and climbed the ragged rocks. It was in one of their long silences that they heard a voice singing — a beautiful voice, clear and strong and sweet — singing a Breton song whose words they could not understand but whose refrain held the sea sadness and the sea lure. They stopped for a moment, standing still to listen; then they moved on slowly, quietly, and as they rounded a heather-crowned mound, they came upon a man sitting in a hollow of the rock, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes looking out to sea. He was in the old Breton costume, but his velvet coat was worn and shabby, the full trousers showed many a patch and had faded in the sun until one could but guess at their original colour. A battered, broad-brimmed hat with its ragged riband, fluttering in the sea wind, lay on the rock beside the singer and heavy hobnailed shoes kept the hat company, while their owner stretched bare brown feet to the sunshine.

The song stopped when he saw the strangers, but he did not move, and when Belinda spoke to him, he returned her greeting civilly in French, but looked away quickly as though expecting the intruders to pass.

Belinda hesitated, looking at the strong, sombre face, with its far-seeing, dreaming eyes. Then she moved

nearer and smiled down at him; but the smile was not the one with which she had so often worked havoc in manly breasts. This smile was grave, humble, pleading; and her voice, when she spoke, was like the smile.

"We are strangers," she said, "who love Brittany. May we listen while you sing?"

He turned his gaze from the sea to her face and studied it carefully, without rudeness and without flattery.

"If you will," he said, at last, and turned once more to the sea.

The girl and the man sat down near him and waited. For the while there was no sound save the breaking of the waves upon the sand below them. Then the music rose again and the Song Man sang on and on, while the sun dropped low in the west and the sea changed from blue to rose and gray. Breton songs, all of them. Only here and there could the listeners understand a word, but the melody and the voice were enough. Into Belinda's eyes crept the dreams and the visions. Her lips were a-quiver with thoughts she could never have expressed. She, too, searched the sea and the sky for secrets hidden when the world was young. And Courtney, watching her face without rebuke, while she saw far sights and heard strange messages, drifted into a dream mood himself, but his dreams were of a to-morrow. He moved nearer her until their shoulders touched, but she paid no heed, and when his hand closed softly over hers, where it lay

white against the grim gray rock, she gave no sign of displeasure. It even seemed as though the cool slim fingers returned his pressure faintly, were glad of the warm human clasp in a world of faery.

The soft, fluttering touch set the man's blood a-flame. The beauty of song and sea and sky were an ache in his throat, the beauty of the one woman's rapt face was an ache in his heart. She was so unutterably dear, so infinitely to be desired — the Rose of the World, though in this softened, dreamy mood, all her prickly thorniness had disappeared. When the deeps break up in the soul of the matter-of-fact modern man, he finds the experience a painful thing. No ex-football hero can discover with equanimity the fact that he is, at bottom, a lyric poet. Jack Courtney had acknowledged that he was in love. Fellows did fall in love. But this thing that was tugging at his heart and beating at his brain there by the Breton sea was too big for him, foreign to all his training and traditions: a gigantic, primal thing with the sweep of far horizons and the sea depth and the sky mystery, holding the music's rhythm and the wave's urge and the sunset's glow. And it found him dumb and helpless and unprepared. How should a hard-headed New York broker, Yale, 1904 (and "Sheff" at that), be ready to walk with the gods and speak their tongue?

But football and Stock Exchange do develop a certain resourcefulness, even if they are not fit training for Olym-

pus. Courtney was swept from his moorings but not wholly overwhelmed. Even the dumb have their methods of expression.

His clasp of Belinda's hand tightened gently, his other hand stole around her waist and drew her toward him. The slender little body nestled cozily in the hollow of his arm, the brown head rested comfortably against his shoulder.

After all, are there better methods on High Olympus?

The Song Man sang on, the girl's brown eyes dreamed, and the lover sat quite still, afraid to stir lest the good moment should slip away. He knew well enough that wizardry had come to his aid, that the girl who leaned against him was scarcely conscious of him, of the admission she was making, but that she should take him with her into her dream was much. He could wait for the rest.

When silence came again, Belinda stirred, moved away, but even yet the glamour of music and sea were on her and she did not seem conscious that the Proprieties were veiling their outraged heads. Love was at home there by the sea.

"Are all Breton songs so sad?" she asked gently, "and so beautiful?"

The Song Man looked at her and smiled a little, but not mirthfully.

"We are not gay, we Bretons," he said. "The sea

gives us our bread and takes its pay in lives. We work and we praise God and we meet what He sends, but we are not gay."

"And yet every one sings, even though the songs are sad; they sing, and the voices are beautiful."

He nodded.

"It is the Blessed Virgin who has arranged it so," he said. "She made a promise to King Grallon, you know, and Our Lady keeps her promises she makes."

"But what did she promise — and why?" Belinda's face was eager and Courtney, watching her, did not wonder that the man's eyes had grown kinder, his lips less stern.

"It was Grallon who was King of Ys. You have heard of the great city that once stood by the sea in Finistère, Mam'selle? One sees the wall yet, in the Baie des Trépassés; and, when the storm rolls the waves in, one hears the bells ringing there below the sea. Travellers laugh; but I have heard the bells of Ys, not once or twice, but many times."

He looked to see whether she, too, laughed, but her face was credulous and grave.

"It was because of the sins of Dahut, the daughter of Grallon, that Ys was swallowed up by the sea; and when Grallon fled on his great horse, with Dahut riding behind him, the sea followed them until the waves had mounted to the saddle. And some say that the waves dragged Dahut down; but the true tale is that Gwennolé, the monk

who rode beside the king, commanded Grallon to push his daughter into the sea, so that he himself might live and work out his salvation. And the king did as the monk said, but always afterward he heard Dahut's voice crying, 'Save me, father!' and he grieved, though he became a holy man. Then Dahut lived in the sea, and as she had won lovers and slain them in her life, so she sang to them and wooed them and slew them in her death; for when she rose above the waves with her golden hair and her beautiful face and sang and beckoned, sailors threw themselves into the sea to reach her and the lovers of Dahut never came back alive to the shore.

"It was Mary Morgan that she was called now, and her soul, which was sinful, was condemned to sin forever: and King Grallon, knowing that he had sent her to the shame, refused to be comforted, and heard always her song in his ears. He built a great church to Our Lady at Rumengol, and at last one day he died, and when he entered Paradise, the Blessed Virgin came to meet him and asked him what he needed to make Paradise happy for him. Since he had given her so beautiful a church, she wished that he might enjoy himself there among the blessed.

"And he asked Our Lady to take away the voice of Mary Morgan so that she might sin no more and find peace; but the Virgin could not do that, for it had been ordered in Heaven that the punishment should endure.

So she promised that she would do what would be almost as good. She would fill Brittany with singers, and with the flood of song the voice of the wicked one would be drowned so that none would hear it.

“It is so that the Pardon of the Singers has come about, Mam’selle. Every year the pilgrims went to the shrine of Our Lady at Rumengol and she touched their hearts and their throats and their lips, so that they came away singing new songs in voices of gold. And, in time, songs of piety rose all through the land so that Mary Morgan sang in vain from the sea and King Grallon was at ease in Paradise.”

He ended the tale and leaned toward Belinda.

“But there are lads who have heard her there in the Baie des Trépassés, the witch, even since the Pardon filled Brittany with holy song and sweet singers, and I myself have heard and seen strange things, Mam’selle, on stormy nights here by the sea.”

They left him there with his songs and his visions and walked home even more silently than they had come. But the face of the man was very happy, and the face of the girl was very sweet. This was another thing of which they would not talk to their fellow-travellers, another gift from Brittany to the two. She was doing her best for them, this rock-ribbed land — bringing them together in her own way.

Belinda did her duty by every one, that evening, a

spasm of conscientiousness following her hours of freedom, as it always did. And Courtney, conscious that he had treated Amelia in cavalier fashion and with no smallest idea that she had been calling down blessings on his head for giving her Belinda's place in Monsieur de Fontanges's car, tried to atone for his rudeness by an evening of devotion. He was happy and all who saw might read that truth; but Laura May read that being with Amelia again was responsible for his happiness and she went to her room that night bent upon confidences.

"Being engaged is just the sweetest thing in the world," she announced as she took the hairpins out of her hair. "Doesn't it seem wonderful that I've found the absolutely perfect man we used to talk about at school?"

She shook her hair out over her shoulders, watching Amelia for a sign of dissent, and smiled when she saw a little curl of skepticism about her friend's lips. Amelia had her own ideas about a perfect man.

"If you'd only find your ideal now and be as happy as I am, everything would be simply perfect. I do so want you to be in love, too — really in love, you know. Not Tommy and Fred Watkins and silly things like that. It's kind of solemn and different when you are really in love."

Amelia opened her mouth impulsively — and shut it again. She mustn't tell Laura May. The Count had said so, but it would be so lovely to talk to somebody

about him. That was half the fun of being in love — telling one's most intimate friend about it.

She sighed — a long plaintive sigh that encouraged Laura May to return to the charge.

"Of course you'll tell me, Amelia, whenever you do find your ideal. You know we vowed, and I told you all about everything just as fast as it happened. I wouldn't have felt honest if I hadn't."

Amelia revolved the proposition in her mind. She *had* vowed. She remembered distinctly when they had done it, up in Laura May's room in school, the night they spilled the fudge all over the carpet. And it was wicked to break a solemn vow.

But Bertrand (she always blushed when she thought of him by his first name. Sometimes it seemed as if she'd never be able to call a count "Bertie" even after she was married to him) had been so firm about the secret. If he really knew Laura May he wouldn't feel that way. She was splendid at keeping secrets.

"It's been such a comfort to talk to you about *him*," Laura May said fervently.

Amelia could understand that. She yearned to talk about her him, and when girls had on their dressing gowns and were braiding their hair it was such a splendid time for talking about lovers and all that sort of thing.

"You wouldn't tell Lord Bantholme if I confided in you about something, would you?" she asked. Laura

May's face expressed hurt surprise — sorrow rather than anger.

"Why, Amelia!" she said in accents of profound reproach.

Her friend apologized promptly.

"Oh, I was sure you wouldn't; but when girls are engaged and married they do seem to tell things more."

"Of course, I tell him all my own secrets," Laura May acknowledged solemnly. "I think that's my duty. I've told him every blessed thing, Amelia, even about Carter Lindsay. He was perfectly lovely about it all. I know it must have hurt him, but he forgave me. He thought he was in love once, too—with a vicar's daughter—but he was only sixteen then. He doesn't seem to have had anything to do with girls since then. But I wouldn't think of telling him anything you confided to me. Do tell me, that's a darling."

Amelia sat down on the bed, the great secret shining in her face and waiting at her lips.

"I can't tell you all about it. There's a reason why I can't. Will you promise you won't ask any questions?"

Laura May promised.

"Cross your heart?"

She crossed her heart.

"I'm engaged myself!"

"Oh, Amelia!"

The two girls fell into each other's arms.

"It's perfectly lovely!" gurgled Laura May. "Are you awfully in love with him?"

Amelia rolled her eyes toward heaven.

"I'm crazy about him."

"Well, he's splendid and I'm just as glad as I can be, but why don't you ——"

"You promised not to ask questions and I can't tell you a single thing more. We aren't going to tell anybody until just before we sail, and I mustn't even talk about it for fear I'd forget and say something I oughtn't to; but I had to tell you. I couldn't keep it from you a minute longer."

There was a tap at the door and Belinda entered on the trail of cold cream. When she left, Laura May went with her to bring the cold cream back.

"I've got to daub it all over my face to-night," she explained. "I'm so burned I can't laugh."

Once in Belinda's room, she seized the chaperon's hands and her great news came out with a plop:

"Amelia's engaged to Mr. Courtney!" she announced. Belinda looked incredulous.

"You see engagements on every bush, my dear."

"But she's just told me about it!"

"Oh!" It was a queer little "Oh," full of many things beside surprise, but Laura May had no ear for subtle inflections and swept on with her story.

"They're awfully happy, and I think it's perfectly

gorgeous, but they aren't going to tell anybody until the trip's over. I reckon they're waiting for answers to the letters they've written her father. You won't breathe it, will you, Miss Carewe? I promised I wouldn't tell Roderick, but I didn't promise about you. It was sort of understood, though, and I oughtn't to have told you, only I was just bursting with it, and I knew you'd be so interested. You won't tell?"

"No," Belinda promised quietly. "I won't tell."

She didn't seem to be as excited as the occasion warranted. Laura May was disappointed in her.

"Don't you think it's fine?" the girl asked.

"I suppose it is, since they are happy. Run along to bed, dear."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JACK COURTNEY DEVELOPS AN UNSUSPECTED PASSION FOR ART

THE electric lights on the Place de la Concorde hung like globes of palest amethyst, in the fast-fading daylight, when three motor cars, white with dust, whirled down the Champs Elysées, crossed the Place, and made their way to the little hotel on the Rue Ste. Anne where rooms were waiting for "Miss Carewe and party of seven."

Belinda groaned in spirit as she mentioned the fact of those reservations to the obsequious commissionaire who welcomed them.

Yes; the party of seven was hers once more, now that she was in Paris. Her holiday was over.

Even in Touraine and Brittany she had soothed and coddled and advised; but, at least, she had not paid bills. Human nature she could manage, but fractions were too much for her; and her only consolation as she once more bent her back to her burden, was a realization that she was in the land of the decimal system.

"Perhaps I can do it in francs," she said to herself encouragingly.

"Multiplying and dividing by ten isn't so bad as some things."

Monsieur de Fontanges and Count de Brissac said their good-byes at the door. To be more exact, they said "*au revoir*."

"For is it not that we are engaged as official guides to Paris?" De Fontanges asked, his gay buoyancy unimpaired by the parting.

"To-morrow you dine with me at Armenonville. Then we will plan excursions. It is only the little expeditions to the country that are charming now. The town is dead. One gives it over to tourists."

"Baedeker seems to think that we can keep busy right here in town," Mrs. Bagby remarked.

"With the museums, the galleries, the tombs, dear lady? If you will, yes. We Parisians have not the fancy for such gaieties. At Fontainebleau, at St. Germain, at Meudon there is history, if one must have history; but, providentially, there are also famous restaurants where one may have *al fresco* dinners that do not smell of asphalt. Me, I prefer always to have my history served in this fashion. It makes for good digestion of facts and dates."

"We have to shop, you know." Laura May was not keen about history save as she intended making a little of it herself when she could introduce her home town to a Paris trousseau.

"I really won't have time to be improved much, Miss Carewe — my mind, I mean. Of course, I know a French dressmaker will do lots for my figure."

"Oh, well," Amelia reminded her, "England isn't far from Paris. You can come over here 'most any time and learn about Marie Antoinette and Napoleon, but you'll need your clothes in October. I wouldn't waste any time on unimportant things if I were you. Fittings always take hours, and hats are simply awful. You have to wear a hat until you get used to it before you can decide whether you want to buy it or not. I'm going to buy four hats, and I shouldn't wonder if it would take me two solid days."

"But in the afternoon when the coolness comes, you will need relaxation from so serious a strain, Mademoiselle," Monsieur de Fontanges said with polite gravity.

"It is then that we will have our history and our little dinners."

The two Frenchmen went away; and, when they had gone, Mr. Perkins turned into the hotel, with an audible sigh of relief.

"A most intrusive person, that old gentleman with the absurd hair," he said scathingly. "But, at least, we will not have to meet him at the breakfast table from now on."

"There are very few men who are endurable at the breakfast table."

Mrs. Bagby's tone was cool and her appraising glance at Mr. Perkins suggested that he was not one of the rare exceptions.

Personal conducting in Paris reminded Belinda of the Pontaven gavotte. Or, at least, it would have reminded her of the gavotte, if that Breton dance had not been altogether too inconsequential even to furnish a comparison.

She had lost interest in folk-dances, and in folk-songs, and in Jack Courtney.

Not since one happy afternoon on the coast of Finistère had that unlucky man succeeded in having a moment alone with her. She hedged herself round with duties when she was not with Count de Brissac, was never at liberty, never without some one of the party beside her. Scheming and plotting were all in vain. He laid his plans and she checkmated them at the first move.

"What have I done?" he asked miserably when, that first morning after he and she had listened to the Song Man among the rocks and heather, he met her and found that she had no welcome for him.

She had looked politely surprised. "Done?" she echoed. "Why nothing. What could you have done?"

That was just it. What could he have done? She had been so close, so kind, so childishly sweet — and now, over night, she had climbed her pedestal again and was so cold, so womanly cruel. Yet between stages he had

done nothing except sleep and dream of her. He had had no opportunity for offense.

For a while he puzzled. Then he gave the riddle up. There was neither rhyme nor reason in her mood. She was heartless and a flirt. He told himself that on an average of twice every five minutes; told himself, too, that it was a matter of profound indifference to him whether she married a rascally foreign count or not. Let her flirt with De Brissac. He would show her that she couldn't hurt him by doing it.

And, forthwith, he proceeded to devote himself to Amelia with an ardour which amazed that Young Person, delighted Laura May's sentimental heart and caused Monsieur de Fontanges an occasional qualm of uneasiness.

"He doesn't even try to hide his feelings any more," Laura May said to Belinda, "but Amelia's too queer for anything about it all. She won't let me talk to her about her engagement and she hasn't told me a thing since that first night. It doesn't seem a bit like her. Why, she used to keep me up all night confiding in me."

In her capacity of chaperon, Belinda worried about the situation, and if only the chaperon in her had been concerned, she would probably have wheedled Amelia into telling her secret; but, for some reason or other, she felt a mighty distaste for interference with the love

affair. In three weeks, the whole party would be in New York. Then Amelia and her father could have things out; and, in the meantime, she would simply keep the girl busy and see that she behaved properly. Omniscience could not be expected of any chaperon.

It was easy enough to keep Amelia busy. The days were full, pressed down and running over, and Belinda came as near achieving the feat of being in two places at one time as is consistent with the irrefutable laws of matter. Not a pair of gloves would the prospective bride buy, not a fitting would she have, not a debated point of colour or line or trimming would she decide unless personally conducted, and Belinda swung from relics of the French Revolution to net dancing-frocks and from pink silk stockings to Puvis de Chavannes frescoes with a giddy momentum that made her dizzy.

"Laura May talks trousseau in her sleep," she said to Mrs. Nicholson. "It's mixed up with everything we do and see. My brain is topsy turvy with it. We were standing at Napoleon's tomb this morning and Laura May clutched my arm. I thought she was actually having a thrill of emotion over the tomb, but bless your heart, no. She decided to have her dinner frock amber—just the 'sweet shade' that the stained glass was throwing on the sarcophagus."

She laughed helplessly.

"It's an obsession, and I'll soon be as bad as she is,"

she confessed. "I'm beginning to translate everything into satin and chiffon and lace. I can't see a bed of flowers without wondering how they would trim a hat, and the stone carvings all look like soutache embroidery, and the Seine is just the gray blue for a travelling costume and the Champs Élysées isn't anything in the world but a beige panel down the front of a foliage-green princess frock. It's awful. My reason is tottering. If it weren't for the motoring when Laura May is in the other car I'd not have a lucid interval."

There was, fortunately, a good deal of the motoring. Early every morning the Earl's two cars arrived, snorting, at the hotel door, and they were in commission all through the day and, often, far into the night.

"You've brought the trousseau curse upon me, wretched young man," Belinda said sternly to the happy lover. "But I'll admit that your cars do to some extent offset the havoc your *beaux yeux* have wrought. There are moments when I feel that I can forgive you."

Those moments were likely to arrive in the late afternoon, when one of the little expeditions which Monsieur de Fontanges had recommended and which he planned, day after day, sent the party on a country flight to some delightful spot where ghosts walked and where a delicious dinner was waiting on a cool terrace or in a shadowy garden. Sometimes when Laura May and Amelia could be induced to spend a whole day without shopping, they

journeyed farther afield; or perhaps the cars were left in the garage and a motor boat requisitioned for a trip along the Seine or the Marne. And always there was the coming back through night shadows and green silences to a fairy city of thick-clustering jewelled lights and music and laughter — an awakened Paris; for, even in August, Paris wakes with the coming of night and sings a siren song.

Oddly enough, it was Mrs. Bagby in whose ears the song sounded most alluringly. Belinda, like a righteous chaperon, censored evening amusements with a ruthless hand and took the girls to the hotel at something approaching a reasonable hour; but Mrs. Bagby asserted her right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. She ate late suppers in companies mixed as only Paris can mix its night crowds. She sat through *café chantant* performances whose French was fortunately Greek to her. She asked embarrassing questions with a calm which struck joy into the soul of Monsieur de Fontanges and brought Mr. Perkins to the verge of nervous collapse, and she did it all with the same cheerful impersonal interest she would have accorded to a new variety of bird or beast.

"I came out to see Europe," she explained serenely, "and I'm going to look at it now I'm here. I guess that after sixty years of Parkersville, my morals ought to be set, if they're ever going to be, and there's no use

dodging everything that doesn't look like a meeting of the Baptist sewing circle."

"But, my dear Mrs. Bagby, one can't touch pitch and not ——" began Mr. Perkins, but she interrupted him.

"Now I'm not calculating to touch pitch. I'm studying human nature, and I don't know as it's any pitchier in Paris than it is in Parkersville, only there's more of it here, and it's more amusing to look at. You stay right at home, Mr. Perkins, if you can't trust your mind and your morals; but I'm not getting a bit more harm out of Paris than I would out of any real lively zoo."

But he didn't stay at home. He went along. So did Miss Perkins and Mrs. Nicholson. A person of determined character is a great boon to the timid.

"We really can't allow her to go about alone with the gentlemen," Miss Perkins carefully explained to Belinda. "I feel that it is my duty to sacrifice my scruples, since she *will* go."

"It's like taking the only child in the family to the circus. Pity you three aren't old enough to feel responsible for the giddy creature," Courtney said to Belinda and the girls.

Amelia groaned responsively.

"This being young in Paris is terrible. If it weren't for the shops, I'd almost rather not have come until I was married or so old everybody'd know I was proper. But we're having a lovely time buying clothes, anyway,

and the saleswomen are awfully entertaining. They tell us who all the people are — the people who come in to choose frocks or be fitted, you know — and all about them. There's usually lots about them, isn't there, Laura May? I shouldn't wonder if we know a good deal more about the actresses Mrs. Bagby has seen than she does."

"Amelia!" The chaperon's tone was sternly disapproving.

"Well, Miss Carewe, you couldn't expect us not to listen. You'd be interested yourself if we weren't with you, but they never talk when you're there. You're doing your best to make Paris like a Sunday School picnic for us; so nobody can blame you if somebody goes and puts champagne in the lemonade, and I always did like punchy kinds of lemonade."

There was, figuratively speaking, more or less champagne in most of the Carewe party's lemonade during those Paris days, for one can be gay in and around Paris even in August, and only the Parisian realizes that the town is dead then. Madame de Lorgeville was in the city, more beautiful, more exquisitely gowned than ever, and apparently quite as much interested in Belinda and the girls as she had been at the Carlton. They saw her at Armenonville on the very first evening of their stay in Paris, and Amelia, who was the first to recognize her, turned excitedly to Count de Brissac.

“There’s your cousin — at the little table under the tree. Isn’t she lovely? Why don’t you go and speak to her?”

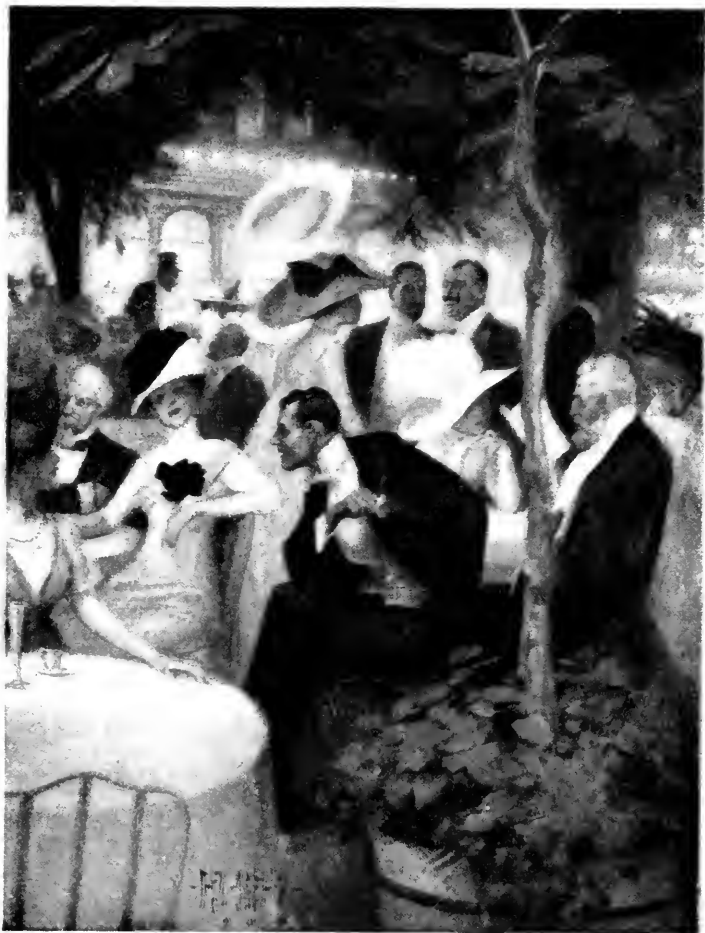
It occurred to Courtney that the Count was not overjoyed at seeing his kinswoman. For an instant there was a frown of annoyance on his face; but it disappeared quickly and he answered Madame de Lorgeville’s smile by a most impressive bow and a friendly wave of the hand. Later he strolled across to her table and stood there for a few moments laughing and talking.

“She’s like a French charmer in a book,” Laura May said rapturously. “If he’d only bring her over and introduce her to us!”

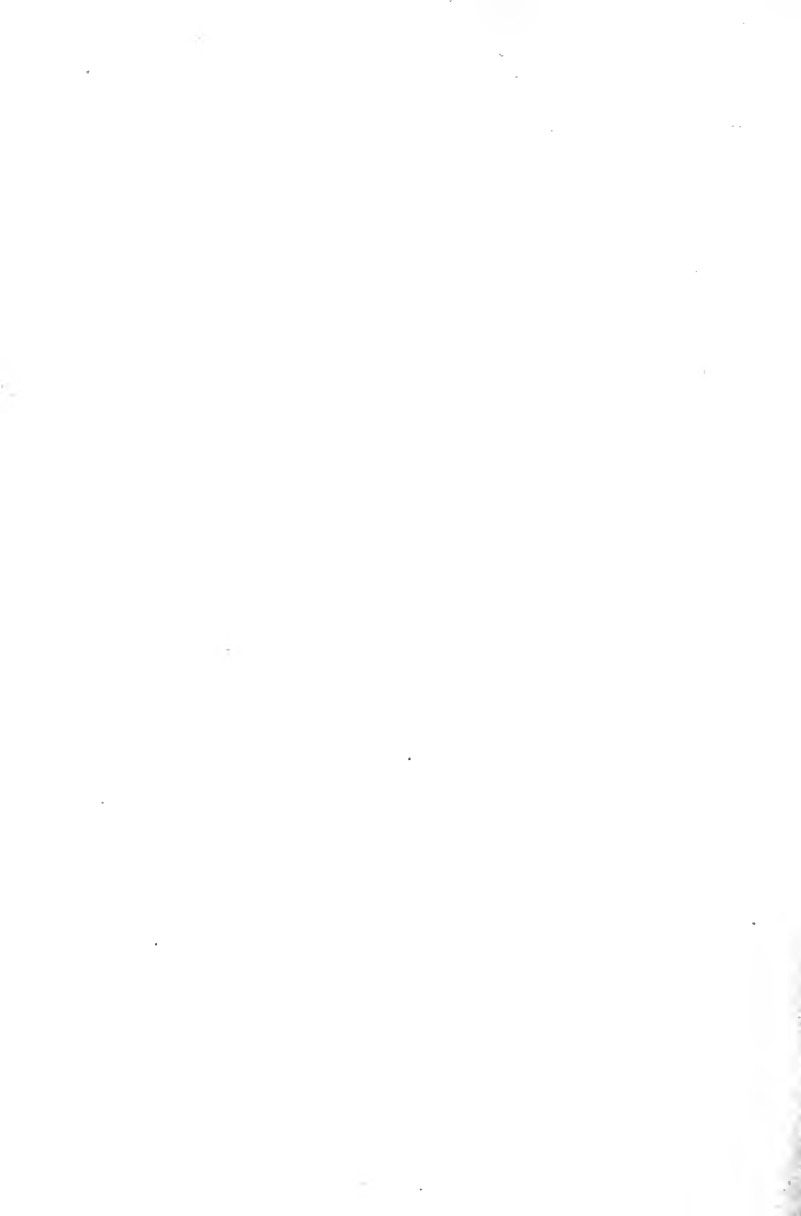
Lord Bantholme made a gesture of dissent.

“Better shut the book,” he said curtly.

After that evening they saw her here, there and everywhere, always radiantly lovely, always surrounded by adoring men, always with the frequent side glances for her cousin and his friends; and, at last one evening, in the garden of the Madrid she quietly waited for the Count as he piloted his party to a table, and was introduced to every one save Monsieur de Fontanges, who was evidently an old friend. She made herself altogether agreeable, charming to a degree that reduced Amelia and Laura May to speechless admiration, and she lingered until the cloud on the face of the escort who sat at his table waiting for her had assumed appalling proportions; but



They saw her at Armenonville



at last she scattered farewell smiles and trailed across the garden to her own table, with De Brissac at her side.

"So this is the quiet visit in Touraine, *mon ami*?" she said with a smile not quite so pleasant as those of which Amelia was at the moment raving.

"You see I, too, have abandoned Trouville and amuse myself."

He was scowling when he rejoined his friends, and the wrinkle between his brows returned whenever, during the evening, he met the Frenchwoman's understanding, mocking eyes.

The trousseau was harvested, sights set down in Baedeker as essential to tourist's salvation were disposed of one by one, Mrs. Bagby's curiosity about Parisian human nature was approximately satisfied, and, two days before sailing date, only the Louvre and the packing remained to disturb the conscience of the Personal Conductor.

The Louvre had been left to the last by general consent.

"There's so much of it," Laura May had said with a weary air. "It seems to me we'd better do everything else and then take just as much of the Louvre as we've got room left for. That isn't such very good English, Miss Carewe, but you know what I mean. I don't believe I've left any place for pictures and statues in my brain pigeon-holes. They're all full of dinner menus and embroidered buttons and willow ostrich plumes and things like that; but I've got Marie Antoinette's farm

and Napoleon's tomb and the other sights down in my diary, and I'm going to buy photographs of them all, so maybe they'll come back to me after I'm married and haven't so much to think about. It's nice to know I've seen them anyway. I've always felt as if no girl ought to get married until after she'd seen Europe, and my wedding gown is such a dream that it makes up for the Rhine and all the dull things, but I don't seem to care very much about the Louvre."

However, Belinda was firm. She did not intend to face Margaret Barnes and confess that she had allowed seven personally conducted tourists to escape the Louvre; so she planned a descent upon that treasure-house of art for the last morning before their departure from Paris. She had to go to the bank and the steamer office herself that morning and wanted to make a hasty call upon the old French dame with whom she had boarded during her first visit to Paris, but she planned to start out early and go directly to the Louvre after her call, meeting her party there at eleven o'clock.

No one looked ecstatic when the programme was announced and Courtney, noticing the general lack of enthusiasm, conceived a brilliant idea. He would incite his fellow-travellers to riot and rebellion and have one more hour alone with Belinda before the European tour ended, in spite of all that haughty young person's objections to such a tête-à-tête.

He began with Mrs. Bagby and told her frankly that he wanted her out of the way. She twinkled at him appreciatively.

"Son, I had an engagement with a wild ass, at the Jardin des Plantes, anyway. I missed him, when I went there before; but he's down in Baedeker, and when I read about a 'wild ass of the desert' in my Bible, I want to know what it looks like. I'd much rather get acquainted with a wild ass than with the Venus de Milo and I'll just take the Perkins family along to meet him."

"Well, don't mention your change of plans to Miss Carewe before she goes out. It won't make any difference to her, you know, whether we all meet her or not."

"Not a bit," agreed Mrs. Bagby. "I don't know what it's all about, boy, but you have my blessing."

Not until after Belinda had disappeared bankwards did Courtney announce to Laura May and Amelia that there was to be a wedding at the Madeleine at eleven.

"Bourgeois affair," he admitted, "but a big one. They'll all go for a drive and have breakfast out in the Bois, and do the regular French wedding stunts. You'd better get Banty to take you to the wedding and follow on their trail."

"But Miss Carewe ——" began the girls.

"Oh, just leave a note for her. I'll take it to her. She won't care so long as you're doing something you like better than Louvre."

They were easily persuaded, and his aunt Florilla, when he explained to her that she was too tired to look at pictures and must save herself for the next day's trip, admitted the truth of the proposition without a murmur.

"But don't say anything to the others about it, dear," she urged. "Some one might feel that she ought to stay with me. Just explain nicely to Miss Carewe when you meet her."

He promised that he would.

So, when Belinda, flushed and showing evidence of having hurried, arrived in the Salon Carré, ten minutes after the hour, and looked around for the accusing faces of the party she had kept waiting, only Jack Courtney stepped forward to meet her.

"Where are the others?" she asked.

"I'm afraid none of them are coming."

He looked serious, even a trifle pained by the defection of his friends.

"They didn't seem to be very keen about the Louvre. Mrs. Bagby and the Perkins wanted to bid a last tender farewell to a wild ass, and Aunt Florilla wasn't quite well, and Banty carried the girls off to a wedding. You couldn't expect anything to stand between Miss Lee and a wedding. They all asked me to explain to you, and I've got a note somewhere from the girls. It seems a beastly shame, though, for any one to miss the Louvre, doesn't it?"

He was hunting through his pockets for the note and he met Belinda's suspicious scrutiny with a frank and innocent face that would have done credit to the celestial choir.

"It's very queer, none of them said anything to me about their plans."

"Oh, I fancy they all made up their minds at the last minute," he said airily. "Messages rained on me, just as I was ready to start out."

"You were very kind to come and tell me. Don't let me detain you now. I'll go back to the hotel and pack."

He looked at her in hurt surprise.

"And the gallery?" he asked.

"You don't want to see the pictures, Mr. Courtney?"

"I'd rather have missed anything else in Europe. I've been looking forward to this ever since we reached Paris."

Just what the "this" to which he had looked forward might be, was not quite clear, but presumably he meant the Louvre.

Belinda hesitated, a suggestion of temper about her mouth and eyes.

"I hadn't suspected you of a passion for art, Mr. Courtney," she said in a tone which Amelia would have characterized as "snippy." But at least you will not need any encouragement from me. I'll leave you to your treat."

His hurt surprise melted into disappointment and reproach.

"I'm a hopeless duffer about pictures," he confessed humbly. "I love them, but I've never had a chance to look at them with any one who could tell me about them. I've counted on that privilege in this trip, but of course I don't want to bore you or make demands upon your time, when you would rather be doing something else."

A sudden vision of his \$1,000 check rose before her eyes, and helpless exasperation filled her soul.

The man had paid for having the Louvre shown to him. She would have to stay and show it.

"I'm quite at your service," she said, in her most businesslike tone.

And then began such a dissertation upon art as would have filled the heart of a professional guide with awe. Since information about pictures and artists was wanted she would furnish it. Not a simpering madonna, not an emaciated saint, not a Susanna and the Elders nor a Prodigal Son did she pass unnoticed. She talked about chiaroscuro and aerial perspective and luminous whites and composition as fluently as though she had known what any of them meant, and she discussed the influence of Leonardo and the Italian school upon French art in a manner little short of inspired.

Courtney listened respectfully, drinking in the words of wisdom and waiting for the flood to cease.

They were standing near a landscape, when she showed

signs of running down — a stretch of gray rock and purple heather and leaden sky.

“Looks a little like Brittany,” Courtney said, with a nod toward the picture. “I was awfully happy in Brittany, Miss Carewe.”

“You’ll be interested in this Claude Lorraine. It’s a particularly fine example.”

He wasn’t interested.

“I thought up there that we were friends.”

“But I can’t say that I care very much about French landscape before the Barbizon school.”

“And I hoped that we wouldn’t drop back to twenty degrees below acquaintanceship. Why did we?”

“Mr. Courtney,” her tone was the one with which she subdued misbehaviour in class, “we came to the Louvre to study art.”

“My dear Miss Carewe, you are entirely mistaken. I came to the Louvre to tell you that I was in love.”

She looked at him, with startled eyes. He was going to tell her about his engagement to Amelia and she didn’t want to hear about it. She wouldn’t — she couldn’t. Amelia could tell her. It was Amelia’s place to tell her — not his.

“You can tell me about that some other time,” she said hastily. “It’s nearly luncheon time and we haven’t seen the Spanish pictures. The Murillos here are wonderful, you know.”

"I'm going to tell you about it now."

He looked very big and determined, and absolutely without interest in Spanish art. She would have to listen to him.

"I'm fathoms deep in love and still going down."

"Hold your breath and paddle with your hands. That's what my swimming teacher always told me," she advised irreverently. Better be flippant than tearful, and she felt that she must either laugh or cry. Perhaps she would do both. A fit of hysterics over the still-life painting of fish and game which hung before her would indicate a highly sensitive nature.

"Don't laugh at me," Courtney was saying. "It's no laughing matter for me now. I came abroad on the girl's account. It seemed to me that in three months I might persuade her I was worth loving, but I've rather fozzled the thing, I'm afraid. Perhaps I'm *not* worth loving, but I think more of myself since I've found out that I can love a woman this way."

He was desperately in earnest. She looked at him for a fleeting instant, and turned back to her still-life with a new hurt in her heart. The man had actually fallen in love with Amelia. He wasn't marrying the girl for her money, after all. She wouldn't have believed that talking about a pink-and-white child like Amelia could make a big man's eyes so deep and soft and tender, but the silly Dora things were usually the ones who succeeded in being tremendously loved.

She wanted to say something properly sympathetic. Since the man wasn't a fortune hunter, one ought to be decent to him. She must think of something kind and encouraging to say to him.

And what she said was:

"That rabbit's legs do look so foolish and floppy. I should think a dead rabbit's legs would be stiff."

She was just as much surprised and distressed as he could be, when she heard herself saying it; and, because she *was* surprised, she laughed, and then, because she was sorry she had laughed, she laughed again.

"Belinda! Haven't you any heart at all?"

Oh, he was frightfully hurt. She could tell that by his voice. She wouldn't have dared to look at him, for she was seeing the floppy rabbit legs through a blurring mist, and, if she hadn't winked energetically, she wouldn't have seen them at all.

But, just because he was in love with a girl whom she was chaperoning was no reason why he should call her Belinda. She would certainly tell him that as soon as her throat stopped squeezing her voice, but she didn't have a chance.

"At last I find you!"

Belinda heard a muffled exclamation from Courtney, bestowed one last, violent wink upon the rabbit, and turned to greet Monsieur de Fontanges.

"But the others?" that smiling gentleman asked, after an inquiring look around the gallery.

"Deserters all," Belinda said, with a snapshot attempt at gaiety.

"The young ladies and Lord Bantholme — yes, I understood that. We met them on the Boulevard and De Brissac has gone with them in pursuit of a wedding party. But I was told that all of our other friends were at the Louvre."

"Every one save Mr. Courtney failed me."

The Frenchman looked eloquent apology at Courtney. He was the last man who would willingly have interfered with another man's game, when that game in no way affected his own.

"We were all to lunch together at St. Germain, you remember. I figured that the hour had almost arrived and that I would join you here."

"Come back to the hotel with us, and we will pick up the rest of the crowd."

Belinda's invitation was cordial. She felt grateful to the little man for coming to her rescue; but Courtney did not speak on the way to the hotel.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AN ELOPEMENT CLEARS THE AIR

THAT farewell luncheon at the Henri Quatre was not a gay affair, in spite of Monsieur de Fontanges's able efforts to make it go merrily.

Jack Courtney hadn't a word to throw to a dog. Laura May and Lord Bantholme, overwhelmed by the thought of a month's separation, gazed at each other mournfully and forgot to eat. Belinda was subdued, though she made occasional efforts to do her conversational duty. Amelia seemed nervous and worried, and Count de Brissac sat silent with moody eyes and dissatisfied mouth.

"You young people don't seem to have stood the Paris pace as well as the old folks have," Mrs. Bagby commented cheerfully. "You all look wore out. I guess the ocean trip will be a good thing for you."

Laura May choked on the last spoonful of her ice, murmured excuses, and hurriedly left the table, followed by Lord Bantholme. She was dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief as they disappeared along the terrace and Banty's shoulders had a tragic droop.

"It's because you talked about the ocean," Amelia explained. "She says she can't stand having it rolling between them, and he's about as bad. I shouldn't wonder if he'd go with us at the last minute."

The party left the table and followed idly in the wake of the disconsolate lovers, until a group of seats tempted the older folk to sit down and look out over the valley to where Paris swam in a golden haze. Belinda, lingering beside Mrs. Nicholson's chair, saw Courtney coming toward her, and looked about her for a way of escape. Count de Brissac was at her elbow and she smiled into his gloomy eyes.

"Is there anything to see?" she asked invitingly. He caught at the suggestion with a curious, eager recklessness.

"The forest walks are beautiful. Will you come?"

She went with him and Courtney, looking after them, set his teeth viciously upon his cigar and made a remark which was unintelligible but appeared to afford him satisfaction.

Beyond the terrace and the palace grounds, the Count and Belinda turned into a narrow path beneath broad-spreading trees; and in a few moments the woods closed round them, shutting them into a world of flickering lights and brooding shadows where the summer breeze, so frolicsome on the terrace, scarcely stirred the leafy clouds of green and the movements of the tiny wood creatures in the tall grass and underbrush sounded loud in the stillness.

The Count was silent and Belinda was glad to walk on and on through the hushed woodland world without making an effort to talk. She was tired — tired of everything. If only she need not go back to the people waiting there on the terrace! If she could turn her back on all the responsibility and worry and fret! They would all be happy without her. They didn't even need her now.

Perhaps it was because she was tired. Perhaps it was because she wasn't needed. At any rate, for some reason or other she felt very forlorn. Foolish tears gathered in her eyes, and as she put her hand up hastily to brush them away, the Count looked down at her and caught a glimpse of wet lashes and quivering lips. A sudden light flamed in his sullen face.

"What is it?" he asked swiftly, stopping short in the shadowy path. "What is it that makes you sad?"

Belinda dropped down upon a convenient fallen tree and achieved a smile; but it was a pitiful little smile. She was so very tired of everything and everybody and she wished the man would go away and let her have a comfortable cry.

But De Brissac had no idea of going away. He had misread the tears, he had misread the tremulous lips; and his reading of them had turned his carefully laid plans topsy turvy and fanned the hidden desire of his heart to flame. If she loved him after all! To the devil with prudence and reason! To the devil with creditors and family, and pink-cheeked heiresses!

“What is it?” he asked again, his hungry eyes questioning her face, his voice hoarse with feeling. “You are unhappy? Because it is good-bye? You care? My God, you really care?”

She tried to speak, to tell him that he had misunderstood, but he would not listen. Women always protested. It was a part of the game — but now he was not playing the game. At last he was in earnest, reckless of consequences, counting the world well lost for love that he had always held so light a thing.

“You would not listen — there in Touraine,” he said; “but you must listen now. I love you, I love you, I love you. I cannot live without you. It was driving me mad to let you go without a word — and now I will not let you go at all.”

He had dropped on his knees beside her and the miserable little woman realized, in a bewildered way, that he did not look foolish even on his knees. She could understand why American girls married foreigners. It was only your Anglo Saxon who could not kneel.

No; he did not look foolish. He was very handsome and ardent and very much in earnest, and he knew that she was poor, and it was good to be loved when everybody was in love with somebody else. Perhaps — perhaps —

“Tell me that you will stay with me, that you love me a little, that you will marry me. I’m a good-for-nothing — a beggar — but I can be a man for you, if you love me. We

will go away and find a new world, a new life, together. A new heaven and a new earth, little love! Will you come?"

He had not touched her, though his eyes and voice were a caress; but now he caught her hands in his and leaned toward her, and, on the instant, a salt sea wind came blowing soft and damp against her flushed cheeks, the close-circling green gave way to wide stretches of azure and rose and pearl. There was sad, sweet music in her ears and a strong hand held hers gently — gently, not fiercely, as the hot hands held hers prisoned now.

What was the use of playing at love? What comfort could there be in being loved where one could not love?

She struggled suddenly to her feet and freed her hands. Her face was a-quiver with pain and pity and a secret something that made it wondrous sweet.

"I can't," she said, half sobbing. "I can't. I was unhappy — but it wasn't that — not what you thought. I wish I loved you. It should be easy for a woman to love you, but I — there's some one else. I'm not happy, but we couldn't be happy, you and I. There would always be the some one else."

And looking into her eyes, he knew she meant it.

For a moment he laid his arm against the tree from which she had risen and hid his face against it. Then he sprang to his feet and laughed — a reckless, beaten, hard little laugh that echoed a look in his eyes.

"The day of miracles is past, Mademoiselle Carewe. I should have known it — and yet, I verily believe you might have had the working of one. Perhaps not. I suppose every credulous fool has his moment of feeling that there's a saint astir in him and that the heavens may stoop to him. Isn't that Mademoiselle Lee's rose-color frock beyond the birches?"

He was quite serene when Laura May came down the woodland path and the young egoists were too much absorbed in their own affairs to notice that their chaperon's eyelids were pink and that she had nothing to say, as they followed the winding way back to the terrace.

No festive plan had been made for the Carewe party's last evening in Paris. There was packing to be done and the Cherbourg train would leave so early in the morning that the luggage must be ready over night.

A farewell motor spin after the St. Germain luncheon, a last cup of tea and gaufrette at the Pré Catalan, and then Monsieur de Fontanges and Count de Brissac made their adieux.

"I go to spend the night in tears," De Fontanges proclaimed with a beaming smile. "To-morrow morning you will behold the ravages of grief. You will see me but a shadow of myself, crushed, prostrated. *Au revoir, Mesdames.*"

After an early dinner at the hotel, Lord Bantholme, too, was banished and wandered reluctantly away to kill

time, while Laura May plunged into a surging sea of tissue paper and chiffons.

"I'll meet you at the Café de la Paix, in an hour, old man," Courtney promised. "My packing isn't complicated."

Belinda helped Laura May to make a start upon her fray, stopped into Amelia's room for a moment to find that young woman exceedingly busy, and apparently much subdued by hard labour or by the thought of leaving Paris, and then faced her own packing problems and forgot everything else in a desperate endeavour to bully the laws of solid measure into submission to the necessity which knows no law.

An hour later, she was sitting on the floor, helplessly gazing at a full steamer trunk and a pile of unpacked clothing, when some one rapped at her door.

"*Entrez!*" she called, scrambling to her feet.

A microscopic French boy in livery several sizes too large for him, opened the door and handed her a note.

"A lady has left this for Mademoiselle. It is of importance — to be read at once, so she has told me to say, but she did not wait."

Belinda turned the note over and over in her hands, questioning the non-committal envelope in the futile fashion common to women.

Who could have written — called? Oh, yes. The message probably had something to do with Laura May's

frocks. Something had been forgotten, delayed. She tore the envelope open, unfolded the paper, and looked surprised. No formal beginning, no signature! Only a few lines, evidently written in great haste, by a woman's hand:

"Mademoiselle Bowers elopes to-night. If she has already left the hotel, you will find her at the Gare de Lyons. They take the ten-thirty train."

For a moment Belinda stared blankly at the words. Then she read them again slowly.

Amelia? An elopement? Impossible! And even as she assured herself that it was impossible, she thought of the girl's sentimentality, her absurd love of romance. An elopement would appeal to Amelia, and as for Courtney — well, it would make things sure for him. Whether he loved the girl or her money, an elopement would gain his point, do away with all chance of family objections or delays.

She looked at the little travelling-clock on the table. Ten o'clock. There was no time to lose! She went quickly down the corridor to Amelia's room. No one there! The trunks were closed and locked. The girl's hat and coat and dress suit case were missing.

Clinging to a last, faint hope, Belinda opened Laura May's door. The girl looked up at her, naiad-like, across an armful of sea-green silken froth. She was quite alone.

"Getting on all right?" the chaperon asked by way of excuse for the intrusion, but she did not wait for the answer.

Running back to her own room she threw on her coat and hat, seized her purse, and hurried to the elevator.

If only Lord Bantholme were in the hotel! But he wasn't, and Mr. Perkins was worse than useless, and she did need a man. Oh she *did* need a man. How she despised the creatures — but there were times when they could be useful.

The commissionaire was not at the door. She was glad of that. Perhaps she could bring Amelia back without any one knowing she had been gone. But if she was too late — what a mess for her! What a simply horrid mess for her! Mr. Bowers would forgive Amelia. He would even forgive Courtney. But he would never forgive her. He would think it was her fault, and every one at the school would know — and it would all be in the papers. Miss Ryder would perish when she saw the school in the papers.

An endless chain of miserable thoughts ran through her head as she slipped out into the night and called a cab.

“Gare de Lyons! Hurry!”

The cocher looked at her curiously as she gave the order but shrugged his shoulders. What was it to him if an American Miss with a white face and a hat crooked and a frightened voice, wanted to hurry to the Gare de Lyons, alone, at night — provided always that she had the fare?

He whipped up his horse and plunged down the narrow street, hurling execrations at all other vehicles obstructing his right of way, and Belinda sank back into a corner of the cab, fighting desperately with tears. This was no time for crying, but she felt very small, very incompetent and very far from home.

Jack Courtney, strolling along the Boulevard des Italiens, saw the cab dash by and made remarks to himself about the irresponsibility of French cabmen. Then he added an uncomplimentary comment upon the irresponsibility of English nobleman. Banty had failed to turn up. Probably he had gone back to the Rue Ste. Anne and was gazing up at Laura May's window. He was capable of such idiocy on this last night.

Courtney laughed at the picture in his mind; and as he laughed a closed carriage drew up suddenly at the curb beside him and a woman leaned out to speak to him. He recognized Madame de Lorgeville and stepped forward, surprised, incredulous. She couldn't want him. There must be some mistake, but she called him by name in a low, nervous voice.

"You have not had my note — at the hotel?" she asked.

He noticed that her face was very white and that her eyes seemed even larger and darker than usual.

"Your note?" he repeated stupidly.

"Yes, I left one for you. She elopes with De Brissac

— the one you love — on the Lyons express — ten-thirty. You will not tell that I —— ”

He did not hear her last words, did not answer, only stood staring after her brougham as it disappeared down the boulevard and repeating words over and over to himself, without real understanding of their meaning.

“Eloping” — “Belinda” — “De Brissac” — “ten-thirty.”

An errant cabman drew up to the curb and regarded him with a speculative eye. He would need a cab, that young American who had dined too well and now did not know his own mind.

Evidently the young man was of the same opinion. He started, as though wakening suddenly, looked at his watch, threw himself into the cab.

“Gare de Lyons! — Like the devil,” he commanded, and the cocher obeyed orders.

The guards were closing the doors of the Lyons express, when a young woman sprang from a cab, paid the driver and ran toward the train. As she ran, she looked down the platform, filled with hurrying porters and belated travellers; and, at the window of a compartment before which an electric light flared brilliantly, she caught a glimpse of a girlish face that brought a quick exclamation to her lips.

“Going, mademoiselle? First or second? No time to look for friends! Get in here!”

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A busy guard bundled her into an empty compartment and shut the door.

She sank down limply upon the seat. She was on the train with them. She could go to them later. She could take Amelia back, hush the affair up. No one need know. A cab horse reached the station on a dead run and was pulled up on his haunches so abruptly that he sat down and slid. A young man flung some coins to the driver and raced across the platform. A guard pulled open the door of Belinda's compartment, shoved the late-comer in, and closed the door behind him. The train started. And Belinda Carewe and Jack Courtney sat staring at each other across three feet of space.

"You!"

It was a chorus recitation, jerked out by a double surprise.

Silence followed.

Courtney found his voice first.

"Don't do it," he pleaded. "Don't, I beg of you. Wait. Consult your friends."

Belinda swept his plea aside.

"How could you?" she demanded, scorn and reproach blazing in her eyes. "It's cowardly of you, abominable. It wasn't necessary. You might have had some manliness, some consideration."

"But there was no one else," he urged. "I know I haven't any right, but I couldn't let you go without

a word. Think of your party! Think of the scandal!"

"You should have thought of the scandal before."

He looked bewildered.

"But no one knows I've come — anyway, I can't add to the mix-up."

Her eyes echoed his bewilderment.

"They'll all know soon enough," she said miserably.

"Don't do it, little woman. Don't."

"I must. I'm responsible. I can't allow it."

"But he's a blackguard. Yes; I know you'll hate me for it and you won't believe it, but he is."

She looked at him with dilating eyes. Was he losing his mind? Who was a blackguard?

"I must take her back," she insisted.

"I'll cover it up someway. No one will know."

He dropped her hands, alarm on his face. She was incoherent. He must spare her.

"Where is *He*?" he asked sternly. He would know how to deal with a man.

"Why aren't you with *Her*?" demanded Belinda.

The two questions came out simultaneously and hung echoing in the air while the man and the girl looked at each other in blank amazement.

"Who?"

It was another recitation in chorus.

Courtney rubbed his eyes and spoke very carefully, very

slowly, as though listening to his own words and testing his own sanity.

"You are overwrought and excited, Miss Carewe. I will find Count de Brissac and say what I have to say to him."

"Count de Brissac? What has Count de Brissac to do with it? Take me to Amelia."

"Amelia?"

"Count de Brissac?" she repeated.

"Amelia?" he murmured.

Suddenly a great light broke in upon him.

"Holy Moses!" he said weakly, falling back upon his seat.

"H-o-l-y M-o-s-e-s!"

Belinda looked at him with wrath and condemnation in her glance.

"Are you quite crazy?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I am — I am."

"You've given every proof of it. I am going to Amelia, *at once*." She rose with an imposing dignity, though her lips twitched nervously; but he caught at her hand and held her.

"Wait a minute," he begged. "Amelia's all right. De Brissac's with her, you know."

Belinda's knees gave way under her and she sat down with indecorous haste.

"De Brissac!" her lips framed, but her voice refused to come.

Courtney nodded, a vast cheerfulness suffusing his countenance.

"Well, naturally. They're eloping together, you know."

And then he did an amazing thing. He turned slowly upside down and stood on his head, and the car turned with him and the lights went round in whizzing circles. She leaned back against the cushions and shut her eyes.

When she opened them again, she was lying on the seat with an anxious young man kneeling beside her and mopping her face with a wet wad of handkerchief. It seemed Anglo Saxons also could kneel.

"Don't do it again," he begged. "Please don't. Everything's all right. They can't get off until the train stops. I'll handle him. Don't worry. Don't faint again."

She sat up, pushing the wet hair off her forehead; and, looking at his distracted face, she began to laugh; and, having begun, she couldn't stop.

"It was all so preposterous—so hopelessly, inexpressibly imbecile."

She laughed and laughed, and the tears trickled down her nose; and, though she knew she was behaving like a hysterical fool, she couldn't, for the life of her, help it.

Courtney soothed, encouraged, entreated. At last he lost patience and shook her.

"Thank you," she said, meekly, drying her eyes. "That was what I needed."

He eyed her suspiciously for a moment as though expecting her to break out in a fresh place; but when she remained comparatively calm, he rose and dusted off the knees of his trousers with his handkerchief.

"Well, for an eventful evening ——" he said, wiping his perspiring brow with the same handkerchief and leaving streaks of grime across its surface.

"The next time, I'll elope myself."

"So will I," vowed Belinda.

"We'll do it together."

She did not encourage the theory.

"I refuse to consider eloping on any other condition," he insisted firmly. "By the way, though," he added, "why, in the name of the seven sacred crocodiles, did you think I was eloping with Amelia?"

"I heard she had eloped, and you were engaged to her and so ——"

"I was *w-h-a-t*?" he asked, clasping his befuddled head in both hands and looking helplessly at the young woman before him.

"You were engaged to her."

"You're delirious! These are ravings. I never even dreamed of being engaged to that reincarnated white kitten. I never dreamed of being engaged to any one except the girl I loved. I met her in an orchard, and I

followed her to Europe, and I endured much at her hands, and I saw her falling in love with a good-looking French scamp —— ”

“She didn’t,” objected Belinda.

“Well, she flirted with him scandalously. I’m going to introduce a bill for having flirting with other men counted among the cardinal sins. It belongs there.”

“But when there’s no Man, there can’t be other men,” Belinda reasoned logically.

“And there was no Man?” he asked. He was on his knees again now. The dusting had been quite wasted. “No man for whom she cared even a little?”

“Your forehead is dreadfully dirty.”

“Belinda, tell me. Haven’t you cared at all? Look at me, little girl.” She lifted her eyes to his for a fraction of a second.

“I’ve de-test-ed you!” her lips said.

“Darling!” His arms went around her. Her head dropped on his shoulder.

“You’re quite sure you aren’t eloping with Amelia?” she asked, after a long silence.

“If you’re positive you aren’t eloping with De Brissac?”

Being foolish young things, they laughed, but Belinda was quickly grave again.

“I must find Amelia. Oh, I do hope that she’ll be reasonable and that the Count won’t —— ”

“I’ll attend to the Count,” Courtney interrupted.

She looked at him gratefully. It was splendid for a man to be so big and so sure of his ability to attend to eloping Counts.

They went along the little corridor and into another carriage. There a guard met them and Courtney stopped for parley.

"There is a young American lady on the train," he said in a careless tone. "Very young, pretty, blonde hair, pink cheeks, dimples, plump."

A gleam of intelligence for an instant lightened the official face.

"With a French gentleman who is tall and dark." The gleam disappeared in blankness.

"I do not remember such a couple, M'sieu."

Courtney put a twenty-franc piece in the man's hand.

"To encourage the memory," he said gravely.

"Ah, M'sieu, it appears to me that I have seen the persons of whom you inquire. They have a compartment reserved in the next carriage, but it is forbidden to disturb them. Impossible to admit M'sieu."

"How impossible?" asked Courtney.

"The tall dark M'sieu has also given me twenty francs.

"This is your lucky day, my friend. Twenty and twenty, and now twenty more. It mounts, does it not?"

The guard grinned contentedly.

"There are days like that," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Come, M'sieu."

He led the way, Courtney and Belinda following, and stopped before a closed door.

"*Le voila, M'sieu.*"

"How long before we stop?"

"Almost immediately, M'sieu."

He opened the door and Belinda stepped through it.

A little scream greeted her, and a muttered oath.

At the sound of the oath, Courtney followed her and shut the door in the face of the deeply interested guard.

For an instant, no one spoke. Count de Brissac had sprung to his feet and faced Belinda, a dull red flushing his face, a sullen shame in his eyes; but she paid not the smallest attention to him. She was looking past him to where Amelia sat huddled in a corner, her babyish face swollen with crying, her expression wavering between fright and joy.

Doubt and remorse had evidently come quickly for the little sentimentalist, and she was in no rapturous, romantic mood.

"Poor dear," cooed Belinda, as she went to the girl, brushing past the Count, as though, for her, he did not exist.

"Poor dear!"

She held out her arms and the girl crept into them, sobbing.

"I didn't realize. I didn't know — he said it would all come out right."

"There, child. Don't cry. It has all come out right. We will take you home. Nobody knows."

"I think, Count de Brissac," said Courtney politely, oh, most politely, as he opened the door, "that there are vacant seats in the next compartment."

The Count whirled upon him swiftly, an ugly scowl on his handsome face, his right hand darting toward his pocket.

The American caught the wrist in transit.

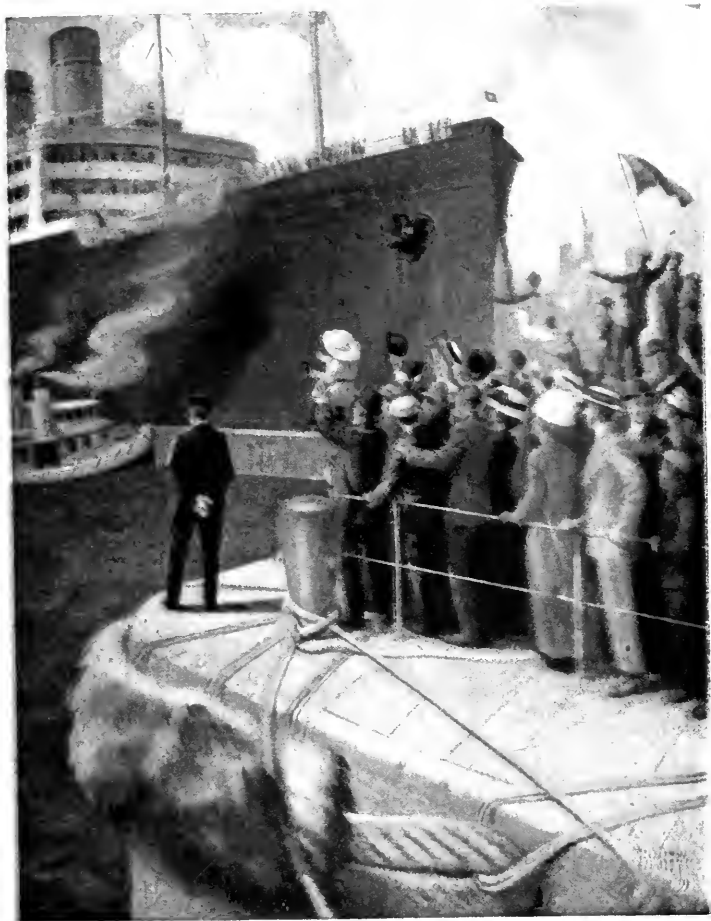
"Steady, you fool," he said quietly, as he propelled the angry man through the door. "We'll have no open scandal here, but if you are really looking for trouble, later on I'll take great pleasure in spoiling your classic countenance by giving you a black eye."

The train was stopping at a station as he went back to Belinda and Amelia. He gathered up the fair eloper's suit case and umbrella, assisted the two girls to leave the carriage, deposited them in the waiting room of the station, and effaced himself without a word. The situation, for the moment, demanded a woman's tact.

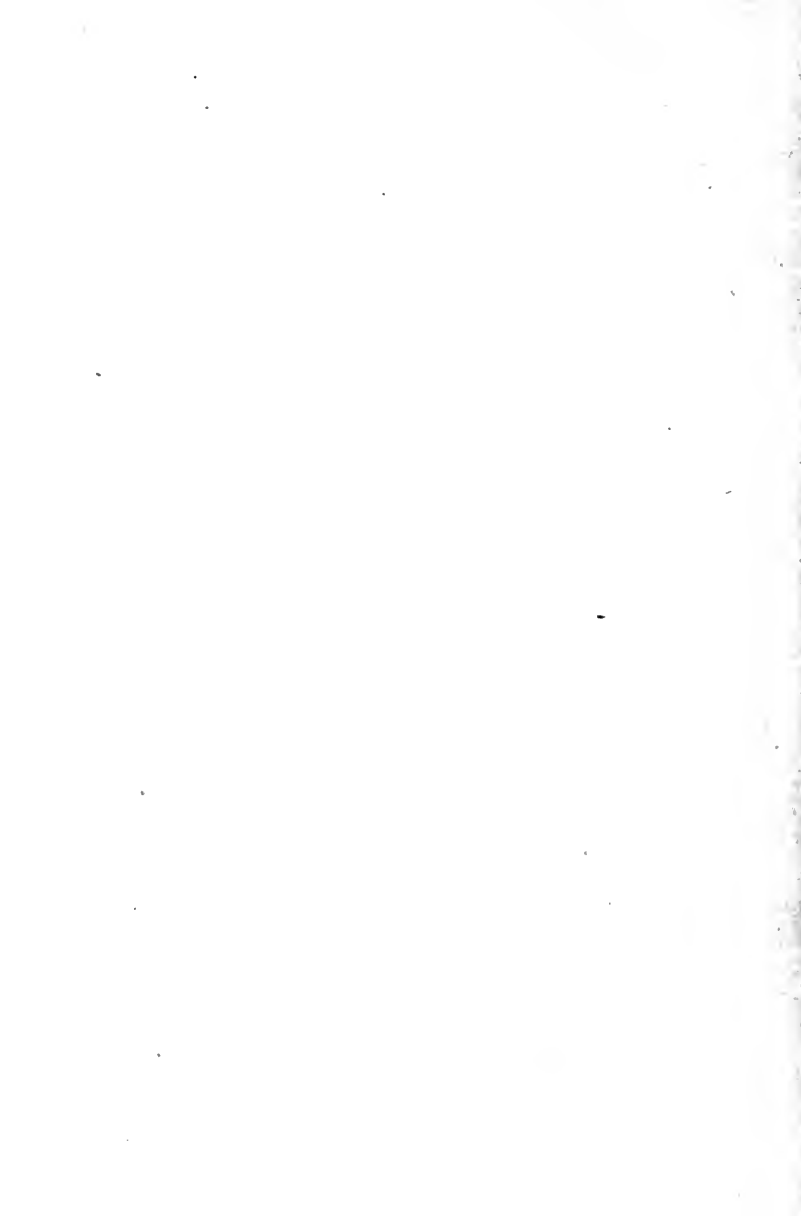
An hour later, the trio boarded a train for Paris. Amelia was not crying now. In fact, she looked distinctly relieved, almost cheerful in the rebound.

"It isn't at all the way they write it in novels," she said, snuggling up to Belinda, with a contented sigh. "I'll never elope again. It's horrid, lonesome business."

A sleepy night porter let Courtney and the two girls



The steamship docked at New York on the morning
of September 15th



into the hotel, without a flicker of interest. One kept such hours in Paris.

When Belinda came from Amelia's room, she found Courtney waiting in the hall.

"It's all right," she whispered. "She's asleep already, poor silly child."

"Everything's all right," the man murmured fervently. "God bless the little idiot for eloping."

The chaperon shook her head.

"It was awful — simply awful. You can't imagine how I felt. I knew it must be all my fault — and Margaret Barnes's fault. She made me come. I'm not fit to chaperon girls. I'm not fit to take care of a party. I ——"

"Need a husband to take care of you," finished Courtney with brazen boldness.

She looked at him with crimsoning cheeks and flashing eyes; but as he waited for the storm to break, suddenly the flash melted to a glow and was hidden behind drooping eyelids.

"Do you know," she said softly, wonderingly, "I believe I do."

When the *Augusta Victoria* docked at New York on the morning of September 15th Margaret Barnes watched an active and competent young man pilot six women and one elderly man down the gang-plank, hunt up their

luggage, see it examined and handed over to an expressman, and then join the group whose storm centre was a demure young woman in a blue travelling frock and a Paris hat.

"Everything is ready now," he said briskly.

"Miss Lee, you are going with Miss Bowers and her father, aren't you? I have a carriage for you and your sister, Mr. Perkins. The driver is paid. Aunt Florilla, Mrs. Bagby will go up to the hotel with you. I'll join you there in an hour."

One by one, the members of the Carewe party fell upon the neck of the little woman in blue and assured her they had had a beautiful time. Mr. Perkins contented himself with wringing her hand, but satisfaction radiated from him, and Mrs. Bagby who followed him looked after him with honest pride.

"I've promised him to think about it," she confided to Belinda. "It'd be a pity to let him backslide."

When the last of the good-byes had been said, the dominant Young Man turned to the girl in blue.

"Come, Belinda," he said, picking up her hand luggage and leading the way to a waiting cab, "I'll see you and Miss Barnes off and then I'll run over to the office for an hour."

He put the two women into the cab, gave an order to the driver, raised his hat, and stood smiling as Belinda leaned forward to wave him a good-bye.

She watched him until the trucks shut him from view. Then she dropped back into her seat and met Miss Barnes's amazed and questioning eyes.

"I know it, Margaret," she admitted blushing. "It isn't at all according to your schedule, but we fairly chewed that schedule to pieces. You see, it didn't provide for any of the really important emergencies. You hadn't given me any rules for assorted engagements and we needed those more than anything else!"

"Belinda, you don't mean —— ?"

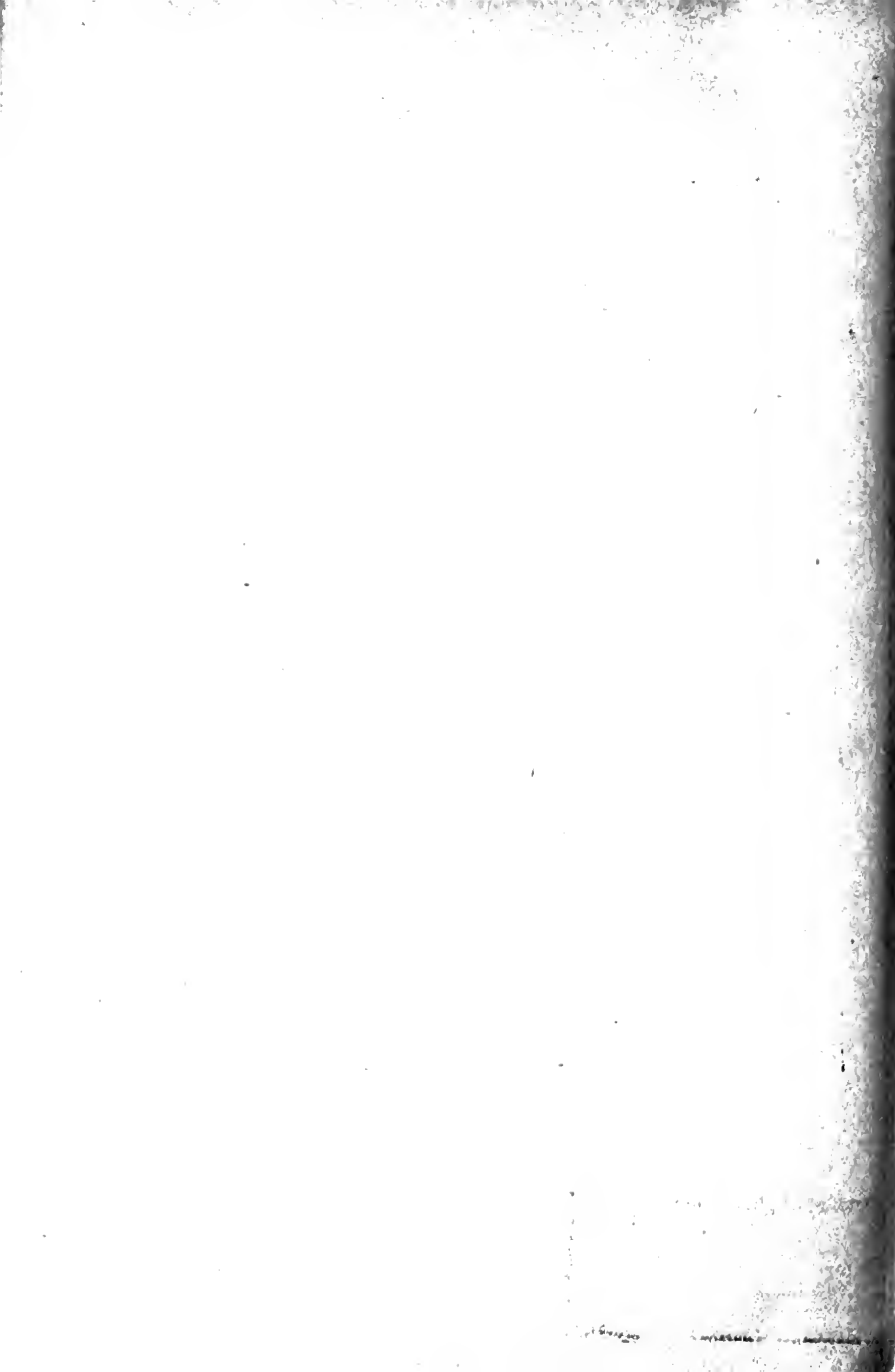
Belinda nodded guiltily.

"Yes, I do. Oh, Margaret, Margaret! My personal conducting has been bad enough, but my personal conduct certainly has been a scandal."

THE END







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